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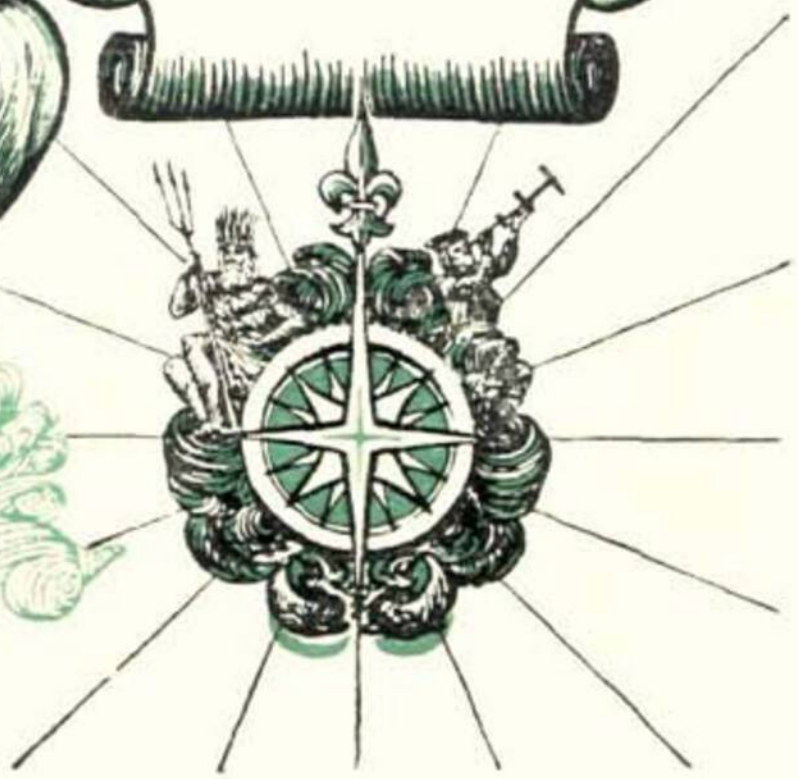

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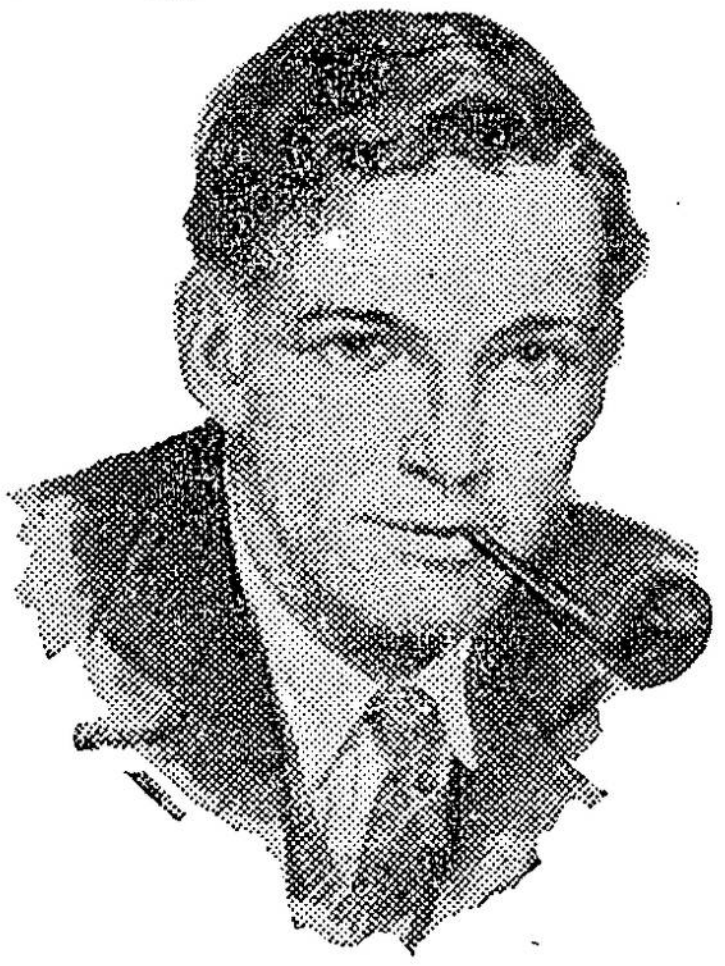

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ARGOSY

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London Wind

SUDDENLY the wind comes round the corner
Filling the awnings like sails, and driving onward
Each shop to loose anchor, sail away for France
Over sparkling seas, fantastic ships of glass.
Curtains loll out of windows, pink tongue, white;
Dustbin lids are rolled like hoops, and leaves,
Squat, palmate hands, clutch, drag with the sound of silk,
But cannot cling to trees blown inside out.

The coster's pony spanks along the road,
His load of cyclamen, little pigs in flower,
Struggle in paper cones; branches snap off;
Hats fly in crowds as the rooks to windy elms;
Paper bags are birds, and birds like bells
Are whirled in the air, like sound made visible.
All is inverted; the day delirious,
And night a circus, stuck with moon and stars,
Tinsel and sand and tan scattered by hooves
Of the horses ridden by the Pleiades.

MARGARET STANLEY-WRENCH

SCENT OF SUMMER

You could smell the straw hat like a handful of fresh hay

by RAY BRADBURY

WILLIAM FINCH stood quietly in the dark and blowing attic all the morning and afternoon for three days. For three days he stood alone, feeling the soft white flakes of Time falling out of the infinite cold steel sky, silently, softly, feathering the roof and powdering the eaves.

He stood, eyes shut. The attic wallowed in seas of wind in the long sunless days, creaked every bone, and shook down ancient dusts from its beams and warped timbers and lathings.

It was a mass of sighs and torments that ached all about him where he stood sniffing its elegant dry perfumes and feeling its ancient heritages. Ah! Ah!

Listening downstairs, his wife Cora could not hear him walk or move or fidget. She imagined she could only hear him breathe, slowly out and in, like a dusty bellows, alone up there in the attic, high in the windy house.

"Ridiculous," she muttered.

When he hurried down for lunch the third afternoon, he smiled at the bleak walls, the chipped plates, the scratched silverware, and even at his wife!

"What's all the excitement?" she demanded.

"Good spirits! Wonderful spirits!" he laughed. He seemed almost hysterical with joy. He was seething in a great warm ferment which, obviously, he had trouble concealing.

His wife frowned. "What's that *smell*?"

"Smell, smell, smell?" He jerked his greying head back and forth.

"Vanilla." She sniffed suspiciously. "*That's* what it is!"

"Oh, it couldn't be!" His hysterical happiness stopped as quickly as if she'd switched him off. He seemed stunned, ill at ease, and suddenly very careful.

"Where did you go this morning?" she asked.

"You *know* I was turning out the attic."

"Mooning over a lot of trash. I didn't hear a sound. Thought maybe you weren't in the attic at all. What's that?" She pointed.

" Well, now how did those get there ? " he asked the world.

He peered down at the pair of black spring-metal bicycle clips that bound his thin trouser-legs to his bony ankles.

" Found them in the attic," he answered himself. " Remember when we got out on the gravel road in the early morning on our tandem bike, Cora, forty years ago, everything fresh and new ? "

" If you don't finish that attic today, I'll come up and toss everything out myself."

" Oh, no," he cried. " I have everything the way I want it ! "

She looked at him coldly.

" Cora," he said, eating his lunch, relaxing, beginning to enthuse again, " you know what attics are ? They're Time Machines, in which old, dim-witted men like me can travel back forty years to a time when it was summer all year round, and children raided ice carts. Remember how it tasted through your handkerchief ? It was like sucking the flavour of linen and snow at the same time."

Cora fidgeted.

It's not impossible, he thought, half closing his eyes, trying to see it and build it. Consider an attic. Its very atmosphere is Time. It deals in other years, the cocoons and chrysalises of another age.

All the bureau drawers are little coffins where a thousand yesterdays lie in state. Oh, the attic's a dark, friendly place, full of Time, and if you stand in the very centre of it, straight and tall, squinting your eyes, and thinking and thinking, and smelling the Past, and putting out your hands to the feel of Long Ago, why, it . . .

He stopped, realizing he had spoken some of this aloud. Cora was eating rapidly.

" Well, wouldn't it be interesting," he asked the parting in her hair, " if Time Travel *could* occur ? And what more logical, proper place for it to happen than in an attic like *ours*, eh ? "

" It's not always summer back in the old days," she said. " It's just your crazy memory. You remember all the good things and forget the bad. It wasn't always summer."

" Figuratively speaking, Cora, it was."

" Wasn't."

" What I mean is this," he said, whispering excitedly, bending forward to see the image he was tracing on the blank dining-room wall. " If you rode your unicycle carefully between the years, balancing, hands out, careful, careful, if you rode from year to year, spent a week in 1909, a day in 1900, a month or a fortnight somewhere else, 1905, 1898, you could stay with summer the rest of your life."

" Unicycle ? "

" You know, one of those tall, chromium, one-wheeled bikes,

single-seaters that the performers ride in variety shows, juggling. Balance, true balance, it takes, not to fall off, to keep the bright objects flying in the air, beautiful, up and up, a light, a flash, a sparkle, a bomb of brilliant colours, red, yellow, blue, green, white, gold. All the Junes and Julys and Augusts that ever were, in the air, about you, at once, hardly touching your hands, flying, suspended—and you, smiling, among them. Balance, Cora, *balance*."

" Blah," she said, " blah, blah." And added, " *Blah !* "

He climbed the long cold stairs to the attic, shivering.

There were nights in winter when he woke with porcelain in his bones, with cool chimes blowing in his ears, with frost piercing his nerves in a raw illumination like white cold fireworks exploding and showering down in flaming snows upon a silent land, deep in his subconscious.

He was cold, cold, cold, and it would take a score of endless summers, with their green torches and bronze suns, to thaw him free of his wintry sheath. He was a great tasteless chunk of brittle ice, a snowman put to bed each night, full of confetti dreams, tumbles of crystal and flurry.

And there lay winter outside for ever, a great leaden winepress smashing down its colourless lid of sky, squashing them all like so many grapes, mashing colour and sense and being from everyone, save the children who fled on skis and toboggans down mirrored hills which reflected the crushing iron shield that hung lower above the town each day and every eternal night.

William Finch lifted the attic trapdoor. But here, *here*. A dust of summer sprang up about him. The attic dust simmered with heat left over from other seasons. Quietly, he shut the trapdoor down.

He began to smile.

The attic was quiet as a thunder-cloud before a storm. On occasion, Cora Finch heard her husband murmuring, murmuring, high up there.

At five in the afternoon, singing *My Isle of Golden Dreams*, Mr. Finch flipped a crisp new straw hat in the kitchen door. " Boo ! "

" Did you sleep all afternoon ? " snapped his wife. " I called up at you four times and no answer."

" Sleep ? " He considered this and laughed, then put his hand quickly over his mouth. " Well, I guess I did."

Suddenly she saw him. " Heavens ! " she cried, " where did you get that coat ? "

He wore a red candy-stripe coat, a high, white, choking collar, and ice-cream flannels. You could smell the straw hat like a handful of fresh hay fanned in the air.

" Found 'em in an old trunk."

She sniffed. " They don't smell of mothballs. They look brand-new."

" Oh, no ! " he said hastily. He looked stiff and uncomfortable as she eyed his costume.

" This isn't a summer repertory company," she said.

" Can't a fellow have a little fun ? "

" That's all you've ever had." She slammed the oven door. " While I've stayed home and knitted, Lord knows, you've been down at the shop helping ladies' elbows in and out of doors."

He refused to be bothered. " Cora—" he looked deep into the crackling straw hat—" wouldn't it be nice to take a Sunday walk the way we used to do, with your silk parasol and your long dress whishing along, and sit on those wire-legged chairs at the soda parlour and smell the drug store—scented with vanilla—the way they used to smell ? Why don't drug stores smell that way any more ? And order two vanilla sodas for us, Cora, and then ride out in our 1910 car to Hannahan's Pier for a picnic supper and listen to the brass band. How about it ? "

" Supper's ready. Take that dreadful uniform off."

" If you could make a wish and take a ride on those oak-laned country roads like they had before cars started rushing, would you *do* it ? " he insisted, watching her.

" Those old roads were dirty. We came home looking like sweeps. Anyway," she picked up a sugar jar and shook it, " this morning I had forty dollars here. Now it's gone ! Don't tell me you ordered those clothes ! They're brand-new—they didn't come from any trunk ! "

" I—" he said.

She raved for half an hour, but he could not bring himself to say anything. The wind shook the house and, as she talked, the snows of winter began to fall again in the cold steel sky.

" Answer me ! " she cried. " Are you crazy, spending our money that way, on clothes you can't wear ? "

" The attic—" he started to say.

She walked off and sat in the living-room.

The snow was falling fast now and it was a cold dark evening. She heard him climb up the step-ladder, slowly, into the attic, into that dusty place of other years, into that black place of costumes and props and Time, into a world separate from this world below.

He closed the trapdoor down. The torch, switched on, was company enough. Yes, here was all of Time compressed in a Japanese paper flower. At the touch of memory, everything would unfold in the clear water of the mind, in beautiful blooms, in spring breezes, larger than life.

Each of the bureau drawers, slid forth, might contain aunts and cousins and grandmamas, ermined in dust. Yes, Time was here.

You could feel it breathing, an atmospheric instead of a mechanical clock.

Now the house below was as remote as another day in the past. He half shut his eyes and looked and looked on every side of the waiting attic.

Here, in prismed chandelier, were rainbows and mornings and noons as bright as new rivers flowing endlessly back through time. His torch caught and flickered them alive, the rainbows leapt up to curve the shadows back with colours, with colours like plums and strawberries and grapes, with colours like cut lemons and the sky where the clouds drew off after storming and the blue was there. And the dust of the attic was incense, burning, and all of time burning, and all you needed to do was peer into the flames.

It was indeed a great machine of Time, this attic, he knew, he felt, he was sure, and if you touched prisms here, door-knobs there, plucked tassels, chimed crystals, swirled dust, punched trunk-hasps, and gusted the *vox humana* of the old hearth-bellows until it puffed the soot of a thousand ancient fires into your eyes—if, indeed, you played this instrument, this warm machine of parts, if you fondled all of its bits and pieces, its levers and changers and movers, then, then, *then* !

He thrust out his hands to orchestrate, to conduct, to flourish. There was music in his head, in his mouth shut tight, and he played the great machine, the thunderously silent organ,- bass, tenor, soprano, low, high, and at last, at last, a chord that shuddered him so that he had to shut his eyes !

About nine o'clock that night she heard him calling, " Cora ! " She went upstairs. His head peered down at her from above, smiling at her. He waved his hat.

" Good-bye, Cora."

" What do you mean ? " she cried.

" I've thought it over for three days, and I'm saying good-bye."

" Come down out of there, you fool ! "

" I drew five hundred dollars from the bank yesterday. I've been thinking about this. And then, when *it* happened, well . . . Cora—" he shoved his eager hand down—" for the last time, will you come along with me ? "

" In the attic ? Hand down that step-ladder, William Finch. I'll climb up there and run you out of that filthy place ! "

" I'm going to Hannahan's Pier for a bowl of clam chowder," he said. " And I'm requesting the brass band to play *Moonlight Bay*. Oh, come on, Cora . . ." He motioned his extended hand.

She simply stared at his gentle, questioning face.

" Good-bye," he said.

He waved gently, gently. Then his face was gone, the straw hat was gone.

" William ! " she screamed.

The attic was dark and silent.

Shrieking, she ran and got a chair and used it to groan her way up into the musty darkness. She flourished a torch.

" William ! William ! "

The dark spaces were empty. A winter wind shook the house.

Then she saw the far west attic window ajar.

She fumbled over to it. She hesitated, held her breath. Then, slowly, she opened it. The ladder was placed outside the window, leading down to a porch roof.

She pulled back from the opened window.

Outside, the apple trees were in bloom, it was twilight of a summer day. Faintly, she heard explosions, firecrackers going off. She heard laughter and distant voices. Rockets burst in the warm air softly, red, white, and blue, fading.

She slammed the window and stood, reeling. " William ! "

Wintry light glowed up through the trap in the attic floor behind her. Bent to it, she saw the snow whispering against the cold clear panes down in that winter world where she would spend the next thirty years.

She did not go near the window again. She sat alone in the black attic, smelling the one smell that did not seem to fade. It lingered like a gentle smile, like a sigh of satisfaction, on the air.

She took a deep, long breath.

The old, the familiar, the unforgettable scent of vanilla.

* * *

CREDIT LINE

Soon after the death of Samuel Butler's father, Burd, the family doctor, was " holding forth " and suggesting things for Butler to mention in the obituary article for the Shrewsbury papers and Butler said to him : " You see, Dr. Burd, one of the greatest feathers in my father's cap was one that I cannot refer to."

Dr. Burd was surprised and asked his meaning.

" I mean," said Butler, " that he was *my* father."

Dr. Burd replied drily that he had not looked at the matter in that light hitherto.

PHILIP HENDERSON, *Samuel Butler : The Incarnate Bachelor*

LAX THE SALMON

Low in the emerald depths he saw its torpedo-shaped body

by ROLAND PERTWEE

IN the Nordurardalur, with its ash-heap mountains, moss-green slopes, precipices, and fields of lava, twisted into every contortion of agony, in the vale through which the River Nordura creeps and crashes, spins, idles, and roars, the tale of the battle between John Cardew and Lax, the great cock salmon, bids fair to become a modern saga.

There is none alive who shall come forward to speak of the truth of the old Icelandic sagas. But truth has a foothold in the wildest legends, and who shall deny that Erik escaped his enemies, and the witches who pursued him across the great glacier now known as Eriksjokull, by turning cartwheels over its everlasting snows ?

There can have been few witnesses of the exploit. Iceland is a wild and empty country with more hills than humans. The blue, cold fingers of the sea, clawing deep into the land, separate a man from his fellows. Also there were few witnesses of the battle between John Cardew and Lax, if one excepts whimbrels and the terns and the little friendly phalaropes, who do not bother to move out of the way of passing strangers.

But Thorarinn, the shepherd, with his falcon eyes, claims to have seen the greater part of it and afterwards exchanged words with Cardew, each in his own language, which was unfamiliar to the other. And Helgi, the old pastor, a lover of truth and a sportsman, vouched that so-and-so did happen. Cardew had little to say—silence being a habit and fashion with him.

John Cardew was of the brotherhood of salmon fishermen and was true to that lodge only. He was compounded of cochineal and sharkskin and reticence. His hands were weathered by exposure, and his eyes rendered keen and kindly by experience.

A twinkling old man with a rough sweetness about him and generosity that broached on a fault. Save to a child, he would never tell a tale that was too hard to believe. He had followed scale and fin over half the rivers of the earth, and had taken part in too many unbelievable affairs to tax his fellow creatures' credulity with a

recital of them. They went down in his fishing diary, which had a lock across its pages, as such an intimate record should.

His captures exceeded mere numbers and were to be reckoned in tonnage. Those calculated to speak on such matters referred to him as one of the five greatest living sportsmen. Between the years 1914 and 1918 there were no entries in the diary, but in the Sportsmen's Battalion he collected unto himself a D.S.O. and bar, which he kept hidden away in company with a bundle of love-letters, tied with blue ribbon, a faintly scented lace handkerchief, and a Tuna button.

It is doubtful whether Lax showed an equal diffidence. Being a rip-roaring, boastful old cock, it is likely that he boasted a bit about his part in the show at the deep-sea meeting-place where salmon assemble after the folly and madness of a spring or autumn run.

Lax, being the biggest fish ever seen in the Nordura, had a reputation to support. He had smashed more tackle and broken more nets than his adversaries would care to confess. Every third year he revisited the Nordura, bulking larger and larger.

Bold as a lion was Lax, but wary as a cat. Sefton, from whom Cardew rented the river, declared that Lax protected his person against the wiles of anglers by surrounding himself with a bodyguard of grilse. The great ones of this earth are privileged and the young suffer and serve that they may go unharmed.

Once Sefton foul-hooked him when spinning, but the connection was brief. Lax smashed him with his first rush and insolently, indolently rubbed off the clinging minnow against the spur of rock upon which Sefton stood disconsolate. There were many similar tales current.

Then came John Cardew to the Nordurardalur. He was appointed with an immense box of rods, too large for the car that conveyed him. At the little port of Borgarness they had promised to deliver it by lorry next day, which in Iceland may be interpreted to mean, "Sometime—never." Wherefore the next day John Cardew found himself with plenty of tackle but no wand with which to cast it.

Your true salmon fisherman is seldom disturbed by a trifle like that. It is easier to inspect a river without the encumbrance of a sixteen-foot rod. Armed with a pocket weather-glass and a thermometer, John Cardew set off across the hummocks on a three-mile walk to S Bend, the southern extremity of the beat.

The water had been falling for days, the sun was bright, and the north-east wind, which is the curse of the Nordurardalur, pressed against his shoulders to speed him on his way. In the

gorge below, the river, greenish-white from recently melted snows, oiled or pounded along according to the angles of its bed.

The vigilant eyes of the old man detected no movement of fish. Where opportunity offered, he went flat on his belly at the cliff edge and looking down saw the salmon lying cat-still in the deeper runs and swims. Like so many sentinels they lay, with scarce a movement of fin or tail. Here and there a grilse skittered irritably, as though offended by the changeless weather, but the older and wiser fish, motionless and emotionless, waited for the freshet which should set their spirits dancing with the urge to run. John Cardew examined his weather-glass and shook his head.

Snow water, a high temperature, and strong sunlight are the enemies of salmon fishermen, and so long as that necklet of white clouds circled the throats of the mountain peaks in the south, the weather would not break—the fish would not move and the box of rods might take as long as it pleased on the journey from Borgarness to the galvanized-iron lodge which, for the next three months, was to be his home.

At S Bend John Cardew waded the river with a precision almost uncanny, for the surface, ruffled by the wind, concealed the stony bed beneath. He seemed to know by instinct the line to follow and when to go upstream or down or straight across. As he waded his feet learned the river bottom and his eyes acquainted themselves with all the lies and swims and eddies which, in the fullness of time, his lures would explore.

In three minutes he learnt as much and more than an amateur would have learnt in as many weeks. Then he turned north and walked upstream by the rocks and shelves and sheep-tracks that margined the river-banks.

At Hot Spring Pool he paused to watch the boiling water gush from the rock and swill, steaming, down a white channel to join the river. Then on again to Rocky Pool, with its view of a great curve of dark green water ahead sweeping under a precipice of perpendicular black rock. This was Myrkhylur, Black Pool, and by all appearances impossible to get round on the river level.

It was Sefton who had told him of the ledge, two feet below the surface, where an intrepid wader could make his way round the pool without putting himself to the trouble of climbing the cliff.

"You'll find part of it easy going. Only one place is really bad. The shelf stops, but goes on a couple of yards beyond. Still, it can be done. A crack in the rock about three inches deep and a couple of fair handholds." Somewhat pithily he added: "But don't fall in."

"Deep?"

"Forty-fifty. Well, you can't see the bottom on the clearest day—hundred, perhaps."

Without the burden of rod or bag, here was a chance to test Black Pool Ledge and form his own opinion of its practicability.

At the tail of the pool the sleek water was divided by a jut of rock and slid, in a double cataract, to froth among stones and glide downstream in running veils of pale jade.

Mentally noting that here was a spot where a fish might easily be lost, John Cardew came under the lee of the precipice and walked the ledge. It was a yard wide at the outset but rapidly narrowed. In the dark green water on his left he watched the antics of a couple of sea trout, looking like a drawing by a Japanese artist. Where the ledge ended, he put out an inquisitive toe and found the crack in which to intrude it.

Followed two yards of tricky balancing and shuffling and then the ledge again on the far side. With enough room for his boots to be provided with a stance, he lit his pipe and viewed the river ahead.

Not a movement disturbed its surface. Save for the terns and phalaropes there was no sign of life. Where his shoulder rested, a white line ascended the rock face to a height of twelve feet and stopped abruptly. He scraped off some of the white substance and carried it to his tongue. It tasted sulphurous. Evidently, in the past, a hot spring, similar to the one below, had gushed from the rock.

The ledge widened as he made his way upstream, and he had almost reached its end when, fifteen feet ahead of him, low down in the emerald depths, a huge torpedo-shaped body attracted his notice.

Lax was lying behind a submerged rock, on either side of which were two attendant grilse.

From where Cardew stood there was no danger of being seen and what followed was not inspired by caution or alarm. The motionless shapes were suddenly transformed into the liveliest activity. The grilse started the business, cruising this way and that as though released from bondage by a word of command. Probably no living thing is better constituted to display excitement than a fish. The antics of schoolboys are insignificant compared with the variety of their swoops and rushes.

At first old Lax took no part in the revels, and then the same excitement infected him. Up from the deeps he came, like a rising submarine, breaking the smooth surface of the water into a thousand waves and ripples as the silver arc of his body pierced through and smote down upon it. And then the whole party drove upstream to the churning throat of the pool as though the devil were behind 'em and Paradise ahead.

" Wheee ! " said John Cardew, for the sight of a salmon, nearer sixty than fifty pounds, in a river where the largest recorded was something under thirty, is apt to excite even the toughest nerves.

In the broken water ahead fish began to splash.

He is a wise man who can explain the telepathic message that instantaneously is conveyed to the dwellers of an entire river within a matter of seconds. One moment nothing moves and the next there is frenzy.

For a mile ahead he could see them splashing, and above the steady drone of the river came the plop-plop of leaping fish.

The white necklet had melted away from the mountain throats, a bank of black, brassy clouds was climbing the sky from the sou'-west. Looking at his weather-glass, he found the needle had fallen out of all expectation.

One of the supreme opportunities in a fisherman's career was present and John Cardew hadn't a rod.

Such a man is not easily plunged into despair. Adjoining the fishing lodge was a farm, and who should say that the chance was lost until he had tried what borrowing might do ?

As he pounded upstream John Cardew had his second view of Lax rolling luxuriously in the broken water at the head of the Myrkhylur. The folly of the moment had gripped the wise one as surely as it had gripped his lesser brethren. If ever there was a chance to slip past his guard it was now.

John Cardew registered the exact spot where Lax had risen, and hurried on.

Ignorance of the Icelandic tongue was no obstacle in explaining his needs. Icelanders are the kindest and most generous of people. The old farmer did not fish, but his grandfather had had a taste for the sport in those days before a salmon river was a source of gold.

A rod—and what a rod !—was unearthed, and confided with many blessings, and Cardew hastened away with it to his lodge.

He did not hurry over the business of setting it up, for that is not the way of an expert. The line, which he threaded through the crazy rings, was the strongest obtainable and the cast of the stoutest gut money can buy. He chose a fly of his own dressing—an immense affair—Turkey, blue hackle and a silver body.

When all was ready he swung the rod expertly and it creaked back at him. The sockets and ferrules were moderately sound, if of uncertain fit, but the brass fittings to carry the reel had an air of great insecurity. Varnish had long since flaked away from its surfaces and the state of the whippings was terrifying.

If he could have spared the time he could have done much to

strengthen them with a reel of silk, but it was impossible to presage how long the movement of fish would last, and he dared not risk missing it. Time is an important factor on a river-bank.

With no great confidence he set off downstream, a gaff across his shoulder and the unwieldy pole balanced in his hand. Uncertainty is, however, part of the game, and his eagerness suffered not a whit on account of it.

Perhaps the rod would break—perhaps it wouldn't—but if it did there might well be some very worth-while experiences beforehand.

Ignoring the invitation of many rising fish, he crossed the river above Black Pool, lit a pipe, and sat him down to watch. The wind had dropped and there was something indescribably queer and threatening in the feel of the air.

Four fish were rising in the throat of the pool—rising almost abreast. Between them and the spot where he had marked Lax was about five yards of unruffled water. The danger most to be feared was getting into a fish above Lax and scaring the whole community. With any of his own rods Cardew could have dropped his fly on to a riding leaf, but with this contraption luck rather than accuracy would determine a cast.

Warily, for he had no faith in his tools, he sent the line sailing on an aerial cruise to and fro above the water. With every forward cast he "shot" an extra yard.

Yes, that should do—across and down with the sweep of the stream to carry the fly over the spot where Lax should be lying.

The heavy fly took the water light as thistledown, and sucked under as the stream tugged at it.

John Cardew had his own almost undetectable method of working a fly. Little restless darts it made, insolent and provoking.

The cheeky bit of blue and silver swung in an arc before old Lax, paused invitingly, and edged away, dipping and curvetting like a live thing. In any other mood Lax would have ignored even that flawless presentation, but the madness was upon him.

A cheeky grilse, three yards below, skittered alongside, inquiring curiously. Lax rode him off, like a polo player, and looping upward in a single movement, drilled down upon the fly to crush it in his bony jaws.

Cardew had a glimpse of the tail, wide as a lady's fan, as it cleft the surface and disappeared, and then the line tightened and screamed. He did not dare to give butt in that first straight, savage rush. Against all the principles of the craft, he kept the point low and let the line stream out.

Not until the union of the waterproof line with its finer backing had flicked through the rings did he apply the smallest pressure;

even so the speed of that rush was barely diminished. A glance at the barrel of his reel revealed the fact that barely twenty yards of backing remained.

With the same uncanny foreknowledge of river bottoms, he moved nimbly and swiftly to the bank at the spot where the ledge began. This he reached as Lax stopped abruptly and began a series of the most spectacular leaps ever witnessed in the Norðurardalur.

The surface in the smooth heart of the pool was lashed into a storm by the fury of them. Six times Lax leapt, child high, shaking his head like a terrier, and then went down—down—down—into the sulky depths of the river.

John Cardew reeled in a few yards of line and edged downstream.

At the present range that separated them, there was no hope of coming to terms, and mindful how fifty yards farther down the ledge ended, no chance was offered of getting below the fish. He must follow the ledge as far as it went and fight out the battle with the cunning of experience.

As he sidled along he gathered in more and more line, and having reached the spot marked by the white line on the cliff face where the stance was no wider than the length of his brogues, gingerly and fearfully he lowered the butt. From the hidden depths of the pool an instant and terrifying protest rewarded the gesture.

Jag—jag—jag.

Under the imposition of that awful strain, the ancient rod groaned dismally and the point came creaking downward.

Jag—jag.

"Some rock down there and he's trying to fray me. If only I dared to pull him about a bit!"

But he didn't dare, and for upwards of an hour the long sulk endured.

Throughout the time that followed, neither the man nor the fish offered the smallest remission of the strain. Only the rod betrayed evidence of fatigue. The temper of old greenheart had its limitations and it was no longer a straight, springy wand John Cardew held, but a natural bow with little or no inclination to return to the perpendicular.

Cunningly he twisted it over in his hand so that the reel was inwards towards his body, but, resentfully, it swivelled round at the worn socket of the lowest joint and bowed its tired head again like a drooping lily.

The atmosphere had become strangely hot and oppressive and the bank of brassy cloud now hung overhead like a pall. Its shadow

upon the water made the pool resemble a vast well of greenish-coloured ink.

Then the sun was blotted out, and a wind worried, moaning, against the face of the cliff. With the passage of every second a threat was maturing. Far away, and echoing cavernously among the mountains, came a rumble of thunder.

John Cardew never knew why that distant peal inspired him to drop the point of the rod level with the water. There is no doubt that thunder has a queer effect upon fish as it has upon many mortals.

The consciousness of approaching storm, coupled with a sudden unexpected relaxation of the strain, deceived Lax into the belief that his efforts to cut the cast had succeeded. Wheeling round and rising almost to the surface, he shot upwards, and was level with his antagonist before he realized the trick played on him.

The speed with which John Cardew reeled up the slack was remarkable.

Divided by a tight line and no more than ten yards apart, man and fish confronted one another for the third stage of the battle. It will not be known whether John Cardew's arms or the muscles that flanked the silver sides of old Lax were the wearier. It is likely the honours of fatigue were divided, for, in that moment, neither one nor the other made any move in the game. They faced and took stock of each other, and earth and heaven seemed to stand still.

Then neither earth nor heaven was still.

No man need be envied who finds himself on a ten-inch ledge, beneath three hundred feet of sheer rock over unfathomed waters, at the moment when the earth begins to quake. The shock was a comparatively minor affair—a mere tremble, carrying with it the intoxicating sensation that one was balanced upon a pyramid of crumbling egg-shells with nothing for their base.

That was bad enough, but far more practical unpleasantness was an avalanche from above, of several tons of rock and stones. The major portion fell a few yards to the right of where John Cardew stood, throwing up a pillar of water that drenched him to the skin and breaking off the ledge as though it were a biscuit.

It was mainly dust and clods of earth that showered down upon the venerable fishing-hat that crowned his head—dust and a single razor-edged stone that cut through the extreme tip of the rod as a cane severs the head of a thistle.

Dazed, bewildered, cut off from advance or retreat, but still hanging on, John Cardew braced his shoulders against the cliff face and waited for what would happen next. And Lax went mad. The speed of his second rush was infinitely greater than the first.

Butt down, John Cardew hung on, and then, horror of horrors, the time-rotted whippings that held the rings to the rod began to draw! One by one he heard them go, with ringing snaps, torn from top to bottom as a man rips undone the buttons of a waistcoat. Like a red-hot wire something burnt and cut the forefinger of his left hand to the bone, and the line ran straight and uninterrupted from the reel to the horny beak of old Lax, boring at the river bottom.

With a direct pull on the rotten reel fittings, disaster was only a matter of seconds. In any case, disaster seemed inevitable, but there was something in John Cardew that made it impossible for him to accept defeat while there was breath in his body. Gripping the line in his right hand, careless as to whether or not he precipitated the smash, he whipped it half a dozen times round his left forearm.

Detaching the reel from its mooring and pocketing it, he dropped the rod and issued the challenge: "It's me or you. Come on—pull!"

And, picking up the gage, Lax pulled against the dead weight, with all the strength that still was in him. Sometimes he pulled steadily and sometimes in savage, staccato, thwarted tugs.

Sometimes John Cardew gained a few loops and sometimes was driven to give them back again. How the gut—even that picked gut—stood the strain is a matter that only a cat and the tackle-dealer who supplied it are able to explain.

Past doubt, Lax knew, by the deadness of the line, that he had beaten the rod and only the man was left to beat.

A little—only a very little—more strength and suddenness was needed to haul him off the ledge into an element where all his skill would avail him nothing. But it wasn't only a man he must dislodge but the determination of man, which is a far more enduring obstacle.

At the tug-of-war game they were equally matched, but when Lax swung inshore, bent on getting slack for a swift outward rush, old Cardew whipped more and more line round that sinewy forearm and the losses of Lax were greater than his gains.

It is not known how long this part of the fight endured. Long enough for that bursting feeling of the brain to be shared by both of them. The struggle had transcended mere physical strength. By any computation of exhaustion, that had been expended long ago. They were fighting with will-power—mental grit—sand, or what you care to call it.

And perhaps because in that quality human beings are more generously endowed than the dwellers of seas and rivers, slowly, inch by painful, patient inch, John Cardew was winning the day.

His fingers had scarcely the power to loop the line he won round and round his coiled forearm, but he did so all the same, and contrived, minute by burning minute, to lessen the distance that separated them. Then once, twice, old Lax rolled sideways, showing the white flag which a salmon carries on his belly and never reveals until the battle is nearly lost.

And, seeing that ensign of defeat, a pang of sorrow dug at the entrails of John Cardew. In a matter of moments now, the gaff would be out and the finest encounter of his life would have come to an end.

Not that the end would be easy. From a ten-inch ledge, a fifty- or sixty-pound salmon cannot be whipped out of the water, dispatched, and creeled like a burn troutlet. The thing would be attempted, because there was that in John Cardew which made it impossible for him to stop short of a journey's end. But every combination of disaster would wait upon the attempt. John Cardew drew a deep breath, threw four or five quick loops round his arm, and reached for the snap fastening of the telescopic gaff.

It is very sure that Lax knew what was coming. Beneath the green shroud that enveloped him, his open mouth seemed to be laughing at fate.

John Cardew crouched at the knees and reached forward with his right arm; as the second shock of the earthquake smote the Nordurardalur. A little enough thing in itself—a faint pulsation of surfaces, like a heart beating under the ribs of a runner, but however trifling in force, there was a malicious twist in its humour.

From the rock above—at the point to which that white line rose—there came a gasp of steamy breath, a pop like a toy gun, and a fountain of boiling spray. The old spring had reopened.

It smote John Cardew upon the back of his neck, and it was not so much the heat, nor the pain of the boiling spray that dislodged him, as the shock—the surprise—the sudden unexpectedness of the assault. He was in the worst position to withstand an attack from the rear. The steamy jet thrust him from the ledge far more surely than any hand might have done.

He had the presence of mind to gulp in a lungful of breath before he was plunged head first into the pool. His wading stockings, air-filled, held him inverted for a few moments, until the weight of the fishing brogues and a vicious, exultant tug from Lax brought them down and emptied them out in a gala of bubbles. He felt himself sucked under, sinking and drawn along by the mutual impulse of the great fish and a sub-surface current fifteen feet below.

They say a drowning man dies happily, and there is none alive

to dispute it. John Cardew did not shut his eyes to meet the end. In the green, spirit-clear element, he could see Lax, exhausted by his final effort, rolling and drifting a yard away.

Once the current brought them so close together that John Cardew put out a hand and with a gesture, half cynical, but wholly forgiving, dropped it in a friendly pat upon the great silver back.

That was before the blood, mounting to his brain, lowered veil after black veil before his eyes.

Two old sportsmen were dying together, and neither could have asked for better company. A vagrant thought threw upon John Cardew's mental screen an image of the two united in death by a couple of yards of unbreakable gut, at rest and drifting out to sea. The vision faded and there was a roaring in the ears as he approached the verges of insensibility.

Something struck his knee sharply. He felt himself lifted and tossed upwards. For an exquisite instant his head was clear of the waters. He saw black clouds with a river of lightning running across them. His lungs emptied like a burst balloon and refilled with air and water mixed. A few yards ahead was the black rock at the tail of the pool where the stream divided into cataracts.

He felt a drag to the right and an equal drag upon his forearm to the left. He and Lax were rushing onwards—downwards—abreast—each at the impulse of the divided currents. The black jut of rock was between them, speeding towards them like a bird of prey, its hooked beak open.

Another second and they would be over the edge and hurled into the boulder-hatched cauldron beneath. He could feel the speed gather before the final plunge.

The jerk on his arm as the line fouled the jut of rock almost wrenched it from its socket. Then something snapped. A bit of blue and silver flicked past his ear. The hook had drawn. His freed arm drifting over a shoulder of the rock fastened and held. He had a flashlight vision of Lax rolling over the brink of the further cataract as he dragged himself clear of the water's pull, gasping and dripping into safety.

For half an hour, head in hands, John Cardew sat upon that rock between the two cataracts and drained the water out of his body and brain and soul. Then, mounting to its crest, he measured the distance and jumped the narrower of the two channels, a leap of which a lad of twenty might have been proud to boast.

Thereafter and most painfully, he picked his way across the chards that scarred the bank to where a sheep-track snaked upwards over the shoulder of the cliff.

It was a long, long while before he reached the summit, for often

he stumbled and was driven to rest, and once he was very, very sick. But at last, he reached it and balanced himself against the cairn of stones which you will find upon all hilltops in Iceland, so that a man may find his way through snow.

Drawing himself up, he turned and looked downstream. And a weary hand lifted to where his hat would have been but that it was already two miles gone towards the sea. Failing to find it, he saluted, as one great general might salute another after a drawn battle.

And in the smooth water of Rocky Pool, half a mile below, the salute was answered. A salmon splashed wearily—but mightily —a monster salmon with a tail as wide as a lady's fan.

* * *

EXCELSIOR !

" I drink the wine of aspiration," said John Galsworthy, but to each man his own vintage. These are folk with a sense of purpose ! Count one for recognizing the character, one for the author and one for the source in each case, making a total of twenty-four points. The answers are on page 100.

1. *Never did alarm-bell produce a greater effect on the hearer than the sound of pickaxe on iron-bound coffer, as the treasure-seeker neared his goal at last in the island grotto.*
2. *A lust for violence was the driving-force of this unprepossessing creature, murderer of wife and child, doctor, hangman and devil !*
3. *For him a dream-girl, a girl with apple blossom in her hair. He would kiss her lips and take her hands, and walk in dappled grass, and pluck the silver apples of the moon . . .*
4. *Twenty-four years of life, and a fallen angel as his servant, were the prizes coveted by this ambitious scientist.*
5. *" We'll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we'll just say the hell with goin' to work . . ."*
6. *A fair lady the goal and the prize : and the obstacles ? Not the rival, after all, but family approval and a handsome income.*
7. *An enticing Utopia this, where the old plain men have rosy faces, and the old red hills are bird-enchanted, and the low green meadows are bright with sward. O to dream and awaken there !*
8. *A maiden in distress at the court of Gloriana, and a dragon to be slain . . . But the knight is arrayed in the armour of God, for his goal is Holiness, and his adversary the deceits of the Devil.*

LAST BOUNDARY

He was the only living man invited to play that night

by LORD DUNSANY

ON one of those short journeys by car that one sometimes takes nowadays I happened to pass after nightfall the once-famous cricket field of Long Barrow. They play there still in the summer, though not so much as they used to do; but this was autumn, when it would be deserted by day, and at night there was nothing there but grey mists that had strayed from a neighbouring stream that winds along under the willows at one end of the ground.

Perhaps it was the contrast between the activity for which that field had been famous and the loneliness of it in that autumn night that made me feel for a moment a sense of desolation.

And then my headlights flashed on the face of an old man sitting on a wooden bench by the side of the field and gazing out into the mists whose shapes floated up from the stream and rose every now and then in little wraiths, as a breeze in the cold night played with them for a while and soon dropped them again. Somehow this solitary figure there seemed to increase the loneliness.

Then just before the light left him, to sweep on and illuminate hedges and branches of trees, the old man began to clap. Sitting all alone on that wooden bench, looking over an empty field, he was unmistakably applauding something.

I went on in the car, and that was all the story I had to tell, a field at night covered with mist, nothing else there, and a man beside it clapping; and not a very likely story either.

But I told it, such as it was, to a friend next day who knew Long Barrow, living nearer to it than I do, and this is what he told me. "Oh, that would have been old Modgers," he said. "He used to be groundsman there, but retired on account of age long ago, and has a cottage almost beside it."

"What was he doing there at that hour?" I asked.

"Well, that's the trouble," he said. "It's not good for him at that age to be out in the cold like that, and we can't stop him, unless we have him legally restrained."

"But surely you can't shut a man up," I said, "merely to prevent him from going out in the cold."

"It's more than that," he said. "The old man thinks there's a

cricket match going on there every night, and he goes out to look at it."

"Who does he think is playing?" I asked.

"W. G. Grace," he replied, "and Gunn, and a lot of other famous players, all of them men he has seen on that ground and all of them dead. We are trying to have him certified. And then they'll be able to keep him in at night."

"Will he like that?" I said rather lamely.

"No," he said. "He wants to go and see ghosts playing cricket. But it's the only way to stop him. His wife can't do it."

"Can you do it on that?" I asked.

"His doctor says so," said Meadly. (That was my friend's name.) "He says he has given him very detailed accounts of the games that he watches, even to the score of each ghost."

So I imagined that I was never likely to see any more of old Modgers.

And then one day only a week or so later, when autumn was a little colder and mistier, I was passing that way after nightfall again, and there was the same old man sitting on his old wooden bench that was still by the side of the ground, and gazing steadily, just as he had before, at the wisps of mist that breezes lifted over the rest and let fall again into the greyness that went all the way to the stream. So they had not certified the old man, and he was still out there of a night in the cold.

Next day I decided to go to Meadly's house to ask him more of the story, the beginnings of which he had told me. I rang his bell and he came to the door himself, and I apologized for disturbing him, and told him that old Modgers was still there at night.

"Come in," he said cheerily, "and have some tea, and I'll tell you about him."

I went into his smoking-room with him and sat down in a comfortable chair, and he said: "The trouble was that one doctor cannot certify a man. It takes two. That is the law. And the old fellow found out that he was going to be certified, and when the second doctor turned up he wouldn't say a word about ghosts. So, in spite of the evidence of his own doctor, we have been unable to get him into an asylum."

"Well, I suppose we'd all try to escape that if we could," I said.

"It isn't the asylum that he jibs at," said Meadly, "but he won't leave his ghosts. You see, he's somewhere in his late eighties, and kept that ground for nearly fifty years and played on it before that; and to give up cricket is to him what giving up much more important things would be to others, and he thinks he's still watching it.

" Of course, if we could prove that, we could get him certified. But we can't. His doctor had the whole story from him ; but that is not enough. We've asked his wife to wrap him up as much as possible. And she does that, but we can't stop him."

" Perhaps it would be possible to reason with him," I said, as tea was brought in.

" I don't think so," he said.

" I'd like to try," I told him. " He can't want to be frozen to death."

"Men don't like to be killed by any of their follies," said Meadly, " but they don't like to give them up. And I suppose more good advice is wasted on asking them if they wouldn't like to do so than on anything in the world."

" Still, I'd like to try," I said.

And so I added myself to the number of those who ask men to give up the harmful things they like most in life. One in every hundred thousand of them succeeds, so why shouldn't I ?

I went over by bus next night to Long Barrow an hour or two after sunset and walked alone to the cricket-ground. And, sure enough, he was on his usual bench, looking out over the famous ground at the first thin wisps of mist that were coming up from the stream and nearing the lonely pitch.

I went up to the wooden bench and sat down beside him. He hastily looked all round, evidently to satisfy himself that two men were not within hearing, and not till he had thoroughly scrutinized the misty darkness did he say anything to me.

Then he spoke. " They are just coming in to bat," he said. " That's Gunn, and that's W.G."

" So I see," I replied.

" You know them, then ? " he asked.

" By sight," I said.

" They often play here," he told me.

" Do you watch them often ? " I asked.

" Whenever they play," he said.

" Is it a good thing to be out so late with all this mist rising ? " I asked him.

" They never play by day," he said.

" But are you sure you are warm enough ? " I asked.

" I wrap up well," he said. " And I never stay more than two hours, unless it's a very exciting game. And I go to bed as soon as I get home."

He stopped to clap them, gazing over the ground towards the approaching mist. And I thought over what he had said, and it seemed to me that if he was really well wrapped up under the good greatcoat that he wore, and if he did not stay more than two hours,

it might not be so serious as Meadly and others feared, at any rate not till the winter.

And so I told Meadly next day. I sat there beside the old fellow for nearly half an hour and heard an excellent summary of a very exciting game, something, I suppose, that had remained in his memory, which was still fresh and vivid, whatever had happened to the rest of his mind, perhaps overweighted and upset by the sheer power of that part of the brain that stores and preserves past days.

It was really a very exciting match. I remember it yet. W.G. won, though that proves nothing, because he nearly always did. I saw Modgers home hale and hearty, and I went to Meadly next day and urged him to leave the old man alone, at least till winter came, and told him that I felt sure he would be all right. And I think I persuaded Meadly. But before winter was here the old man died.

What happened, as we afterwards heard from his wife, was this. Only a fortnight later, being a bit older than Meadly had thought, he reached his ninetieth birthday. And old Mrs. Modgers told us that on that very evening, while they were having a bit of a supper and a glass of wine with which to celebrate the occasion, the mist having risen, but no higher than one of their windows, old Modgers had glanced out of the window and suddenly said they had made him an honorary member, an honorary member of the ghosts who used to play at Long Barrow, because he was ninety.

Modgers had said that this was a great honour, because he was the only living man that had been invited to play at night on that ground. And they were going to play that night, Modgers had said; and the Doctor himself—that is, Dr. Grace—had invited Modgers to play for him. So Modgers had gone; she couldn't stop him. And this time he wouldn't even dress up warm.

"Well," she said, "he went out there with his bat, for he had an old bat that he still kept in a cupboard, and he said he wouldn't want pads, because the ball they were using wasn't as hard as all that, and he went out to the pitch and bent down like as if he was batting, and began hitting about."

"But surely," Meadly said to her, "he didn't run."

"He seemed to be hitting boundaries," said Mrs. Modgers. "I stayed and watched the whole time, but he wouldn't allow me to bring him home. He seemed to be hitting boundaries, and so did the gentleman opposite, whoever that may have been, or perhaps I should say *whatever*, seeing they was all ghosts, but for him.

"After he had hit about twenty of them he seemed to get tired and not to be able to hit so far, and then he had to run. And after a while he took off his hat two or three times and looked round about him, seemingly very pleased. And I think he had got his century.

"And that was when it happened. Of course a man of his age

couldn't run like he did, and he dropped dead. I could do nothing."

We both made those vain attempts that people sometimes make with words, trying to comfort Mrs. Modgers. But, though we knew we could bring her no comfort whatever, we both of us saw a gleam on her face that seemed, faint though it was, to shine from a hidden smile, as she said, "They were never able to shut him up. And he'll be able to play at Long Barrow now with the Doctor and Mr. Gunn whenever he likes."

* * *

SAFE ASSUMPTION

Miss Emily gazed up at the stained glass window. "Well, at least I can be thankful for one thing. We still have *this*."

I did not dare to tell her how I felt about it, so I merely nodded.

"You do agree, don't you, that it does something to the house that nothing else could do?"

"I certainly do."

"I'm so relieved." Poor dear, she really was. It was a most difficult situation. Maddening as some women can be, one does not want to hurt them. I could not trust myself to make any comments on the window, as a work of art, so I asked her if there was any story connected with it.

"But hasn't anyone ever told you? *She* . . ." pointing to the mermaid . . . "is the first Mrs. Stebbing."

"But why a mermaid?"

"The first Mrs. Stebbing"—and there was a chill in Miss Emily's voice which suggested that she held a dim opinion of that lady—"was on the stage. Not a very great success, I believe. She was dressed as a mermaid when Mr. Stebbing first saw her in the theatre."

"I see. And is this a scene from the play?"

"From the play?" Miss Emily looked quite shocked. "Certainly not. It is a sacred subject. She—the first Mrs. Stebbing—is ascending into Abraham's . . . ahem . . . bosom."

So *that* was what it was, the small mauve triangle under the old gentleman's beard. It was Abraham's ahembosom. Who would have thought it? I had often pondered, in an absent-minded sort of way, over this celebrated refuge, and had wondered what it would be like, if and when one reached it. I had looked forward to my own chances with somewhat mixed emotions, for I felt that Abraham's ahembosom must by now be somewhat overcrowded . . .

"I see." I longed to ask if Abraham himself was a portrait of the late Mr. Stebbing, but it might have been tactless.

BEVERLEY NICHOLS, *Laughter on the Stairs*

BONNE BOUCHE

Bring in the bottled lightning, a clean tumbler, and a corkscrew

CHARLES DICKENS

Nourish me on an egg, Nanny,
And ply with bottled stout,
And I'll grow to be a man
Before the secret's out.

Nourish me on an egg, Nanny,
With bottled stout to drink,
And I'll grow to be a man
Before you can think.

Nourish me on an egg, Nanny,
Don't wring your hands and weep,
Bring me a glass of stout
And close my eyes in sleep.

STEVIE SMITH, *Tender Only to One*

Forbidden Fruit

On Christmas Day of this year 1857 our villa saw a very unusual sight. My Father had given strictest charge that no difference whatever was to be made in our meals on that day . . . but the servants, secretly rebellious, made a small plum-pudding for themselves . . . Early in the afternoon, the maids—of whom we were now advanced to keeping two—kindly remarked that " the poor dear child ought to have a bit, anyhow," and wheedled me into the kitchen, where I ate a slice of plum-pudding. Shortly I began to feel that pain inside which in my frail state was inevitable, and my conscience smote me violently.

At length I could bear my spiritual anguish no longer, and bursting into the study I called out: " Oh! Papa, Papa, I have eaten of flesh offered to idols! " It took some time, between my sobs, to explain what had happened. Then my Father sternly said: " Where is the accursed thing? " I explained that as much as was left of it was still on the kitchen table.

He took me by the hand, and ran with me into the midst of the startled servants, seized what remained of the pudding, and with the plate in one hand and me still tight in the other, ran till we reached the dust-heap, when he flung the idolatrous confectionery on to the

middle of the ashes, and then raked it deep down into the mass. The suddenness, the violence, the velocity of this extraordinary act made an impression on my memory which nothing will ever efface.

EDMUND GOSSE, *Father and Son*

Bon Appétit

He and she with swimming
Every noon were wild for food ; a Basque
Woman cooked on charcoal—aubergine with garlic,
And there were long green grapes exploding on the palate
And smelling of eau de Cologne. They had nothing to ask
Except that it should go on . . .

LOUIS MACNEICE, *Provence*

Literary Luncheon

Autran also stayed with Dumas père for a time. He was woken the first morning by Eau de Benjoin who came in with a message from his master asking what he would like for lunch.

"Parbleu!" Joseph Autran replied. "Go and tell Monsieur Dumas that it's all the same to me."

But Eau de Benjoin was soon back. "As Monsieur Dumas is cooking the meal himself," he said, "he insists that you decide on the menu, sir, otherwise you might think he had just prepared the only dishes he knew how to make."

The visitor suggested the first two or three dishes that occurred to him, and presently followed the black servant to the kitchen. There was Dumas, in black velvet trousers and a white shirt, his mop of frizzy hair all unruly, standing before a great oak table covered with kitchen utensils. And while he cracked eggs and trussed a bird, he talked eloquently of Euripides.

EDITH SAUNDERS, *The Prodigal Father*

Dessert

All these cates in earthen dishes came . . .
Hot meat came piping from the fire. And shortly thereupon
A cup of green hedge wine was brought. This ta'en away, anon
Came in the latter course, which was of nuts, dates, dried figs,
Sweet-smelling apples in a maund made flat of osier twigs,
And prunes and plums and purple grapes cut newly from the tree,
And in the mids a honeycomb new taken from the bee.

ARTHUR GOLDING, 1536–1605,
Philemon and Baucis

Two for the Road

"How quick your servants are!" Miss Quested exclaimed, For a cloth had already been laid, with a vase of artificial flowers in its centre, and Mahmoud Ali's butler offered them poached eggs and tea for the second time.

"I thought we would eat this before our caves, and breakfast after."

"Isn't this breakfast?"

"This breakfast? Did you think I should treat you so strangely?" He had been warned that English people never stop eating, and that he had better nourish them every two hours until a solid meal was ready.

E. M. FORSTER, *A Passage to India*

Waiter!

I am so dry I cannot speke;
I am nigh choked with my mete;
I trowe the butler be aslepe.
With "Howe, butler, howe!"

Author Unknown, Balliol MS.

Fare Well

The headman of Moshu sat where they had dined, nursing the bowl of toddy . . . He nodded again and drew something from his bosom and put it on his head. "Look," he said. "Pretty."

It was a beret of pillar-box red. Through the stupor that was slowly mounting and encompassing his mind, Basil recognized it. Prudence had worn it jauntily on the side of her head, running across the Legation lawn with the *Panorama of Life* under her arm . . .

Basil shook him violently. "Speak, you old fool. Where is the white woman?"

The headman grunted and stirred; then a flicker of consciousness revived in him. He raised his head. "The white woman? Why, here," he patted his distended paunch. "You and I and the big chiefs—we have just eaten her."

EVELYN WAUGH, *Black Mischief*

Haunting Flavour

Oh, when I was a little Ghost,
A merry time had we!
Each seated on his favourite post,
We chumped and chawed the buttered toast
They gave us for our tea.

LEWIS CARROLL, *Phantasmagoria*

LEMON BLOSSOM

**As he sat silent in the shadow,
her timid gaze met his**

by EDITH MACWHIRTER

EACH day when she wakened and stepped out into the morning, she still longed to see the betel-nut palms and the giant leaves of the banana trees framing the endless patchwork of the Bengal plain : she still yearned to hear the tinkling chatter of the women at the village well, and the languid creaking of the bullock carts along the dusty road ; and she still expected the air to carry the warm scents of the rice-lands, or to come quivering against her cheek, sweet and languorous with new lemon blossom. And so remembering, her first glimpse each day of the city's busy riverside came anew as a shock to her.

She stood looking at it now from the doorway of her uncle's tea-stall, to which she had been sent at her father's death, three months ago—looking at the broad silver gleam of the river, weighted with its towering cargo of ocean-going ships, looking at the smaller boats which patterned the shadowed water below the steep port-holed sides, and at the homelier country craft sailing calmly by, with the little dinghies, busy already on a new day's work, ferrying to and fro between ships and shore.

She narrowed her eyes as she followed the passage of the dinghies. Was he out there already, the young manji—the young boatman—with the gentle voice and the smiling face, who, each night when his work was done, came to drink tea at her uncle's tables ? To drink tea, and to look at her from the shadows beyond the hissing glare of the petrol lamp : to drink tea, cup by slow cup, and to look at her with shy, smiling eyes ; and, last night when her uncle was busied elsewhere, to speak with her, small comforting words about the distant village countryside for which each was sad.

" This would be the season of the simul flowering in our village," he had said.

" And in our village, too, the forest will be fiery with red blossom," she had answered.

" The fallen petals will be lying in scarlet drifts along the roads," he had prompted.

" And the jute retting must all be ended," she had mused.

"Already the wayside pools where the jute is soaked will be drying out with the rainless months."

"Soon now the noisy koel will be calling from the mango trees."

"Soon the lemon blossom will be in flower."

"— The lemon blossom," she had echoed. "There was a tree at my father's gate . . ." And her memories had come welling in silence between them, seeming to engulf the boy, too, so that he was with her as she stood again at her father's door, drinking in the heady scent of lemon blossom that surged out on the warm air from the sprawling tree beside the gate.

But her uncle's raucous city voice had come calling her, chiding her for day-dreaming, ordering her about her duties, demanding fresh, strong tea, and quickly, for an important patron.

Coming alive to the crowded riverside tea-stall again, she had seen the sailor from the ocean-going ship standing there in the harsh lamplight jingling the money in his pocket, smiling his ingratiating smile—flashy and gold-toothed—and talking in his loud important seagoing voice. And after that there had been no more opportunity for talk with the young manji.

Returning night brought the sailor again, dominating the stall with his tales of foreign seas and distant lands, and with his noisy and vulgar largesse.

"Free tea to all my friends," he had called to the proprietor, flourishing a handful of money. "Everyone is my friend tonight. Free tea to all my friends!"

The young manji, watching from the shadowed corner, refused the offered drink, and paid out his annas himself; but when he tried to draw near to speak with the girl, the sailor elbowed him roughly back, giving him a bold, scornful look, a look meant to dismiss him as river trash, which it was his duty as a seafaring man to keep in its proper place.

So the youth sat in the silent shadow, chin in hand, watching the girl; and when the girl had looked up from her work, her timid gaze had met his, and without words they had spoken to each other, and the sailor, following the girl's glances, had become aware again of the boy.

Next night when the sailor came for his tea, he carried a parcel below his arm, and, calling the proprietor to summon his niece, he undid the wrapping and spread out a length of bright silk before the girl. Green it was, with a gold thread running through it.

When the girl saw it, she put out a wondering finger to stroke its shining folds; and everyone gathered about the sailor to admire the rich cloth and to hear his tales of the far eastern city where it was bought. Only the young manji remained aloof, watching the girl as she looked at the proffered silk.

" Take it ! " the sailor urged her. " Where have you seen such a glory of colour before ? Where will you see it again ? Take it ! "

The girl hesitated and glanced at the sailor's face, and then down again at the tempting silk ; and the boy in the shadows followed the conflicting course of her thoughts before he spoke from his corner.

" Colour ? " he said quietly. " What meaning has a lifeless length of green tinselled cloth to one who knows by heart the colour of young sunlit rice, to one who can recall the brilliant flight of parrots sailing homewards through the golden, sunset dust ? "

His eyes met the girl's as he spoke, and he saw her relief as she pushed temptation away from her, and shook her head in refusal at the sailor.

Next night it was an elaborate shiny handbag which the sailor brought with him from his ship. American, he said it was, a handbag of pockets and slide-fasteners and unexpected excitements ; and, as the girl filled up all cups at the sailor's expense, the crowd gathered about him to listen to his tales of western ways and splendours.

Only the young manji refused the free tea and had no interest in the loud stories. He sat alone in his corner watching the girl confronting the invitation of the shining bag.

The sailor was showing her how the two-sided mirror was enclosed in its own pink silken case ; and the youth saw a light come rippling into her eyes as she gazed at the bright toy ; and her pleasure showed in a shy, timid smile which weighted the boy's heart ; but the sailor took advantage of the smile, thrusting his gift into the girl's hands.

" And see this pocket, too," he said. " Here is the money kept—" and he pulled the gliding silver fastener, and plunged in his fleshy hand—" Room in plenty," he said, " for a thick pack of notes—ten rupees, a hundred rupees—a sailor's wife needs a roomy purse."

He laughed a noisy laugh, and his friends laughed with him. The girl was abashed and turned away and was busy with her tea-making ; but the boy sensed that her thoughts still lingered with the tempting gift, and that for a moment both he and her longing for her village home were half forgotten.

He cast urgently in his mind for words and pictures to recall her to realities, but no swift intuitive comparisons would come to his aid that time. He could only stand there in dumbness watching the girl's awakening interest, and the sailor's importuning, and the swift pleasure on the uncle's face at the mention of money and marriage ; and his heart was not only heavy but angry. He left the tea untasted in his cup, and went out into the riverside night, and stood looking at the tall, lighted ships, trying to sort out the tangle of his thoughts and his hopes and his emotions.

In the months before she had come to the riverside he had been

almost contented, for his six years as a manji were drawing to a close, and there was money saved and stowed away in his bundle, money enough for a bigah or two of rice-land. And as he'd rowed to and fro, fro and to, between shore and ship, ship and shore, he had pictured to himself the day when he would go rowing upstream away from the seagoing ships to find a small boat bound for inland waters and his own countryside.

That day he would be so happy to be rid of the city river that he wouldn't even bother to watch as the ocean ships and the smoky skyline dropped away into oblivion downstream. And each mile that the little country boat wound deeper into the quiet countryside, his happiness would grow in him.

Soon he would go singing through his own fields, soon there would be a plough and a pair of bullocks and a thatch-roofed house with a mustard plot beside it, and children playing in the sunshine at the door; and about the house there would be a tinkling of anklets and bracelets and the soft tones of a woman's voice.

He had been happy with his picture of the future until the girl had come to the river and, coming into his life, had given a name and a reality to the woman who moved about the home of his dreams.

But now he knew that his happiness was being taken from him.

With the sailor's money to feed the uncle's greed, what chance had his own modest marriage offer? He, a humble manji, who thought in pice and annas, competing with a sailor who talked in tens and hundreds of rupees? If the sailor had never come, then perhaps the uncle would have listened to his suit—but now, what chance had he of any hearing?

Ah, if only the sailor would go again! Did not all ships in time, late or soon, reclaim their crews and sail away again? But how soon *would* the sailor go? How late would he linger? How far would he have journeyed with the girl before once more he went to sea? What hope was there in awaiting such events?

Better to forget the girl, leave the riverside tomorrow, and seek solace in his own countryside. And yet, a village home without the girl, what flavour had it now?

Round and round went his thoughts and his hopes, this way and that they threaded and pulled, yet always they gave one unvarying answer. All his happiness lay with the girl, and if he were to win her, it must be now, now before the sailor with his wiles and his money and his gifts had time to worm a way into her affections.

Ah, it was easy to speak such bold plans to one's heart, but to bring them into being was another matter. He wandered on in the city night, barely realizing that he had long since left the riverside, and now walked through streets where lighted windows

winked out at him through the orderly shadows of trim gardens.

It was only when he smelt the lemon blossom, heady and sweet, on the night about him that he realized how far he had travelled.

The next evening when the sailor came to the tea-stall he brought a gift of bracelets—golden they were with bright, flashing stones—and he spoke of the fabulous country where they had been bought, as he held them out to the girl.

" Come," he said, beckoning her close, " let us see if they will fit about your wrists." And he smiled at her, reaching out his hand ; but the girl hung back.

" Come, girl," her uncle ordered, " where are your wrists ? " And he looked sidelong at the sailor, aware that the girl's reluctance increased her value in the sailor's eyes. But she only stood there unwillingly, twisting her hand in her sari, and looking down at the ringed pattern of the waiting tea-cups.

" Come now, come ! " her uncle admonished. " It's time you shook off your stupid village shyness and got used to city ways. Come, let's see how such rich ornaments will suit you."

" A sailor's wife needs strong wrists," the sailor said, smiling slyly at the girl, " for the weight of golden ornament they must carry." And his dark-haired hand reached out and closed firmly about her fingers, but before he could twist the bracelet on her arm, there was a scuffling beside him.

" Tea ! Tea ! Quickly ! Eight cups of tea ! " called an urgent voice at his elbow. " Tea ! Come now, tea ! Don't keep busy manjis waiting." And the youth with a crowd of fellow boatmen shouldered his way to the counter beside the girl.

Immediately, she snatched her hand from the sailor's moist clasp, and busied herself with the cups ; and a sudden awareness fell silently on the tea-stall, where everyone watched the situation between the girl and the sailor and the boy.

The girl kept her eyes lowered as if all her concentration was absorbed in the stirring of the sugar in the cups. The sailor was struggling to preserve a genial temper, tossing the bracelets lightly in his hand as he waited, as if he knew that such tempting trinkets and such wealth as produced them were inviolate in the realm of marriage offers—knew that he could afford to bide his time.

As he tossed the bracelets nonchalantly in the lamplight, their stones sparkled, and they made a little tinkling music, and the sailor looked from the bracelets to the girl, wondering how soon their tinkle and sparkle would come into their own.

But the boy beside him was opening a tattered cloth and drawing out a little garland—green it was, with white, waxy flowers, their

petals pink-veined; and the tea-stall was filled with the sweet scent of lemon blossom.

At once the girl's hand paused in its stirring and went out towards the garland, and she stood motionless with the flowers twisted in her fingers. Then she raised her head, and she looked across the bright lamplight, looked straight through the flashy bulk of the sailor, as if he and his jangling pockets and his tinkling bracelets had no reality at all.

She looked straight through the row of faces turned towards her above the steaming cups, through the darkness of the riverside night, and the lighted bulk of the ocean-going ships, and she saw only a lemon tree beside an up-country gateway.

There beyond it was the sunlit richness of the great Bengal plain, and above it gilded evening parrots were going over, and soon down the dusty road would move a home-coming figure, singing contentedly as he drove back the oxen from the day's long ploughing, and smiling a greeting when he came to the gateway—smiling, and speaking to her with the young manji's voice.

When she slipped out into the night, under pretence of fetching more water, the boy was waiting for her there. Above the clatter and din of the tea-stall beside them, they could distinguish two loud voices—the sailor's and her uncle's, driving their mercenary marriage bargain.

But soon the music of oars dipping rhythmically in the river dimmed all other sound for them. The girl, listening, saw the silhouette of the young manji dark against the tinselled water: the boy saw the gentle shadow of the girl with the garland glimmering palely in her hair; and as their boat moved purposefully upstream, the scent of lemon blossom went with them to guide them home.

NEXT MONTH'S ARGOSY

Outstanding Short Stories by

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★ SCIENCE FICTION CHOICE

FEMALE OF THE SPECIES

Assorted faces appeared, with their eyes popping and jaws dropping

by JOHN WYNDHAM

THE first I heard of the Dixon affair came from a deputation of Membury villagers who called to ask us if we would investigate the alleged curious goings-on there.

It so happened that my co-inspector Alfred Weston and I were together in the office of the S.S.A.M. on the morning that the Membury deputation arrived. As they filed in I could see Alfred's eyes begin to widen in anticipation of something really good—or horrific, depending on which way you were looking at it.

Our premonitions were right. There was a certain confusion in the telling, but when we had it sorted out, it seemed to amount to this: early the previous morning, one Tim Darrell, while engaged in his usual task of taking the milk to the station, had encountered a phenomenon in the village street. The sight had so surprised him that while stamping on his brakes he had let out a yell which brought the whole place to its windows or doors.

The men had gaped, and most of the women had set up screaming when they, too, saw the pair of creatures that were standing in the middle of their street.

The best picture of these creatures that we could get out of our visitors suggested that they must have looked more like turtles than anything else—though a very improbable kind of turtle that walked upright on its hind legs.

The overall height of the apparitions would seem to have been about five foot six. Their bodies were covered with oval carapaces, not only at the back but in front, too. The heads were about the size of normal human heads, but without hair, and having a horny-looking surface. Their large, bright, black eyes were set above a hard, shiny projection, debatably a beak or a nose.

But this description, while unlikely enough, did not cover the most troublesome characteristic—and the one upon which all were agreed despite other variations. This was that from the ridges at

the sides, where the back and front carapaces joined, there protruded, some two-thirds of the way up, a pair of human arms and hands!

Well, about that point I suggested what everyone else would: that it was a hoax, a couple of fellows dressed up for a scare.

The deputation was indignant. For one thing, it convincingly said, no one was going to keep up that kind of hoax in the face of gunfire—which was what old Halliday who kept the saddler's had given them. He had let them have half a dozen rounds out of a twelve-bore; it hadn't worried them a bit, and the pellets had just bounced off.

But when people had got around to emerging cautiously from their doors to take a closer look, the creatures had seemed upset. They had squawked harshly at one another, and then set off down the street at a kind of waddling run.

Half the village, feeling braver now, had followed them. The creatures had not seemed to have any idea of where they were going, and had run out over Baker's Marsh. There they had soon struck one of the soft spots, and finally they had sunk out of sight into it, with a great deal of floundering and squawking.

The village, after talking it over, had decided to bring the matter to our attention as inspectors for the Society for the Suppression of Animal Maltreatment rather than to report it to the police. It was well meant, no doubt, but, as I said: "I really don't see what you can expect us to do if the creatures have vanished without trace."

"Moreover," put in Alfred, never strong on tact, "it sounds to me as if we should have to report that the villagers of Membury simply hounded these unfortunate creatures—whatever they were—to their deaths, and made no attempt to save them."

Alfred Weston was a well-built man, though not tall, who peered through heavily rimmed glasses with an earnestness that seldom lightened. The difference between us was that while I was doing a job, he was following a vocation—pursuing it wholeheartedly, and with a powerful imagination to energize him.

Now, between him and all animals there was complete affinity—at least, on Alfred's side. It wasn't his fault if the animals didn't quite understand it; he tried hard enough. The very thought of four feet or feathers seemed to do something to him. He cherished them one and all, and was apt to talk of them, and to them, as if they were his dear, dear friends temporarily embarrassed by a diminished I.Q.

The deputation appeared somewhat offended at Alfred's accusations, but it turned out that they had not finished. The tracks of the creatures had been followed back as far as possible, and the consensus was that they could not have had their source

anywhere but in Membury Grange. A Dr. Dixon, they told me, had lived there these last three or four years.

That led us on to Bill Parson's contribution. He was a little hesitant about making it at first.

" This'll be confidential like ? " he asked.

Everyone for miles around knows that Bill's chief concern is other people's rabbits. I reassured him.

" Well, it was this way," he said. " 'Bout three months ago it'd be . . . "

Pruned of its circumstantial detail, Bill's story amounted to this : finding himself, so to speak, in the grounds of the Grange one night, he had taken a fancy to investigate the nature of the new wing that Dr. Dixon had caused to be built on. There had been considerable local speculation about it, and, seeing a chink of light between the curtains there, Bill had taken his opportunity.

" I'm telling you, there's things that's not right there," he said. " The very first thing I seen, back against the far wall was a line of cages, with great thick bars to 'em. The way the light hung I couldn't see what was inside but why'd anybody be wanting them in his house?

" And then, when I shoved myself up higher to get a better view, there in the middle of the room I saw a norrible sight—a *norrible* sight it was ! " He paused for a dramatic shudder.

" What was it ? " I asked, patiently.

" It was—well, it's kind of hard to tell. Lying on a table, it was, though. Lookin' more like a white bolster than anything—'cept that it was moving a bit. Kind of inching, with a sort of ripple in it—if you understand me."

I didn't much.

" Is that all ? " I asked.

" That it's not," Bill told me, approaching his climax with relish. " Most of it didn't 'ave no real shape, but there was a part of it as did—a pair of hands, human hands, a-stickin' out from the sides of it . . . "

In the end I got rid of the deputation with the assurance we would look into the matter. When I turned back from closing the door behind the last of them I perceived that all was not well with Alfred. His eyes were gleaming widely behind his glasses, and he was trembling.

" I think," he said, with impressive earnestness, " I think we are on the track of something *big* here. Very likely something that will at last stir people's consciences to the iniquities that are practised under the cloak of scientific research.

" Do you know what I think is happening on our very door-step ? "

"I'll buy it," I told him, patiently.

"I think we have to deal with a super-vivisectionist!" he exclaimed, wagging a dramatic finger at me.

I frowned. "I don't get that," I told him. "A thing is either vivi- or it isn't. Super-vivi- just doesn't—"

"Tcha!" said Alfred. "What I mean is that we are up against a man who is outraging nature, abusing God's creatures, wantonly distorting the forms of animals until they are no longer recognizable, or only in parts, as what they were before he started distorting them," he announced, involvedly.

At this point I began to get a line on the truly Alfredian theory that was being propounded. His imagination had got its teeth well in, though later events were to show that it was not biting quite deeply enough.

The following afternoon Alfred and I presented ourselves at the lodge of Membury Grange, and gave our names to the suspicious-looking man who lived there to guard the entrance. He shook his head to indicate that we hadn't a hope of approaching more closely, but he did pick up the telephone.

The guardian turned back to us from the telephone, wearing a surprised expression.

"He says as he'll see you!" he told us, as though not quite certain he had heard aright. "You'll find him in the new wing—that red-brick part, there."

The new wing, into which the poaching Bill had spied, turned out to be much bigger than I had expected. It covered a ground-area quite as large as that of the original house, but was only one storey high.

A door in the end of it opened as we drove up, and a tall, loosely-clad figure with an untidy beard stood waiting for us there.

"Good Lord!" I said, as we approached. "So that was why we got in so easily! I'd no idea you were that Dixon. Who'd have thought it?"

"Come to that," he retorted, "you seem to be in a surprising occupation for a man of intelligence, yourself."

I remembered my companion.

"Alfred," I said, "I'd like to introduce you to Dr. Dixon—once a poor usher who tried to teach me something about biology at school, but later, by popular repute, the inheritor of millions, or thereabouts."

Alfred looked suspicious. This was obviously wrong: a move towards fraternization with the enemy at the very outset! He nodded ungraciously, and did not offer to shake hands.

"Come in!" Dixon invited.

I sat down in a magnificent easy chair.

Alfred had no intention of compromising himself by sitting down.

I gave Dixon the report just as we had it. When I reached a description of the turtle-like creatures he looked somewhat relieved.

" Oh, so that's what happened to them," he said.

" Ah ! " cried Alfred, his voice going up into a squeak with excitement. " So you admit it ! You admit that you are responsible for those two unhappy creatures ! "

Dixon looked at him, wonderingly. " I *was* responsible for them— but I didn't know they were unhappy. How did you ? "

Alfred disregarded the question. " That's what we want," he squeaked. " He admits that he—"

" Alfred," I told him coldly, " do be quiet, and stop dancing about. Let me get on with it."

When I ended, it was with an excuse that seemed necessary. I said to Dixon : " I'm sorry to intrude on you with all this, but you see how we stand. When supported allegations are laid before us, we have no choice but to investigate. Obviously, this is something quite out of the usual run, but I'm sure you'll be able to clear it up satisfactorily for us.

" And now, Alfred," I added, turning to him, " I believe you have a question or two to ask."

Alfred leapt, as from a slipped leash. " What I want to know is the meaning, the reason, and the method of these outrages against nature. I demand to be told by what right this man considers himself justified in turning normal creatures into unnatural mockeries of natural forms."

Dr. Dixon nodded gently. " A comprehensive inquiry—though not too comprehensibly expressed," he said. " I deplore the loose, recurrent use of the word ' nature.' Nevertheless, I think I understand you to mean that my nature has prompted me to use certain material in a manner which your prejudices do not approve. Would that be right ? "

" There may be lots of ways of putting it, but I call it vivisection—*vivisection* ! " said Alfred, relishing the word like a good curse. " You may have a licence. But there have been things going on here that will require a very convincing explanation indeed to stop us taking the matter to the police."

Dr. Dixon nodded. " I rather thought you might have some such idea : and I'd prefer you did not. When I have explained, I think you will understand my position better."

He paused, thoughtfully eyeing Alfred who did not look like a man intending to understand anything. He went on : " The crux of

this is that I have not, as you are suspecting, either grafted or readjusted or in any way distorted living forms. I have built them."

For a moment, neither of us grasped the significance of that—though Alfred thought he had it.

"Ha! You can quibble," he said, "but there had to be a basis. You must have had some kind of living animal to start with—"

But Dixon shook his head. "No, I mean what I said. I have *built*—and then I have induced a kind of life into what I have built."

We gaped.

I said, uncertainly: "Are you really claiming that you can create a living creature?"

"Pooh!" he said. "Of course I can, so can you! Even Alfred here can do that, with the help of a female of the species. What I am telling you is that I can animate the inert because I have found how to induce a—life-force."

The lengthy pause that followed was broken at last by Alfred.

"I don't believe it," he said, loudly. "It isn't possible that you, here in this one-eyed village, should have solved the mystery of life. You're just trying to hoax us because you're afraid of what we shall do."

Dixon smiled calmly. "I said that I had found *a* life-force. There may be dozens of other kinds, for all I know. I can understand that it's difficult for you to believe; but, after all, why not? Someone was bound to find one of them somewhere sooner or later. What's more surprising to me is that this one wasn't discovered before."

But Alfred was not to be soothed.

"I don't believe it," he repeated. "Nor will anybody else unless you produce proofs—if you can."

"Of course," agreed Dixon. "Who would take it on trust? Though I'm afraid that when you examine my present specimens you may find the construction a little crude at first.

"As for your suspicion that my specimens suffer, Mr. Weston, I assure you that they are coddled—they have cost me a great deal of money and work. And, in any case, it would be difficult for you to prosecute me for cruelty to an animal hitherto unheard of, with habits unknown."

"I am not convinced," said Alfred, stoutly.

The poor fellow was, I think, too upset by the threat to his theory for the true magnitude of Dixon's claim to reach him.

"Then, perhaps a demonstration . . . ?" Dixon suggested. "If you will follow me . . ."

Bill's peeping exploit had prepared us for the sight of the

steel-barred cages in the laboratory, but not for many of the other things we found there—one of them was the smell.

Dr. Dixon apologized as we choked and gasped: "I forgot to warn you about the preservatives."

"It's reassuring to know that that's all they are," I said, between coughs.

The room must have been getting on for a hundred feet in length, and about thirty high. Bill had certainly seen precious little through his chink in the curtain, and I stared in amazement at the quantities of apparatus gathered there.

There was a rough division into sections: chemistry in one corner, bench and lathes in another, electrical apparatus grouped at one end, and so on. In one of several bays stood an operating table, with cases of instruments to hand; Alfred's eyes widened at the sight of it, and an expression of triumph began to enliven his face.

In another bay there was more the suggestion of a sculptor's studio, with moulds and casts lying about on tables. Further on were large presses, and sizable electric furnaces, but most of the gear conveyed little to me.

"No cyclotron, no electron-microscope; otherwise, a bit of everything," I remarked.

"You're wrong there. There's the electron—Hullo! Your friend's off."

Alfred had sort of homed towards the operating table. He was peering intently all around and under it, presumably in the hope of bloodstains. We walked after him.

"Here's one of the chief primers of that ghastly imagination of yours," Dixon said. He opened a drawer, took out an arm, and laid it on the operating table. "Take a look at that."

The thing was a waxy yellow, and without other colouring. In shape, it did have a close resemblance to a human arm, but when I looked closely at the hand, I saw that it was smooth, unmarked by whorls or lines: nor did it have finger-nails.

"Not worth bothering about at this stage," said Dixon, watching me.

Nor was it a whole arm: it was cut off short between the elbow and the shoulder.

"What's that?" Alfred inquired, pointing to a protruding metal rod.

"Stainless steel," Dixon told him. "Much quicker and less expensive than making matrices for pressing bone-forms. When I get standardized I'll probably go to plastic bones: one ought to be able to save weight there."

Alfred was looking worriedly disappointed again; that arm was convincingly non-vivisectional.

"But why an arm? Why any of this?" he demanded, with a wave that largely included the whole room.

"In the order of asking: an arm—or, rather, a hand—because it is the most useful tool ever evolved, and I certainly could not think of a better. And 'any of this' because once I had hit upon the basic secret, I took a fancy to build as my proof the perfect creature—or as near that as one's finite mind can reach.

"The turtle-like creatures were an early step. They had enough brain to live, and produce reflexes, but not enough for constructive thought. It wasn't necessary."

"You mean that your perfect creature does have constructive thought?" I asked.

"She has a brain as good as ours, and slightly larger," he said. "Though, of course, she needs experience—education. Still, as the brain is already fully developed, it learns much more quickly than a child's would."

"May we see it—her?" I asked.

He sighed regretfully.

"Everyone always wants to jump straight to the finished product. All right, then. But first we will have a little demonstration—I'm afraid your friend is still unconvinced."

He led us across towards the surgical-instrument cases and opened a preserving cupboard there. From it he took a shapeless white mass which he laid on the operating table. Then he wheeled it towards the electrical apparatus further up the room. Beneath the pallid, sagging object I saw a hand protruding.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Bill's bolster with hands!"

"Yes—he wasn't entirely wrong, though from your account he laid it on a bit. This little fellow is really my chief assistant. He's got all the essential parts; alimentary, vascular, nervous, respiratory. He can, in fact, live. But it isn't a very exciting existence for him—he's a kind of testing motor for trying out newly-made appendages."

While he busied himself with some electrical connections he added: "If you, Mr. Weston, would care to examine the specimen in any way, short of harming it, to convince yourself that it is not alive at present, please do."

Alfred approached the white mass. He peered through his glasses at it closely, and with distaste. He prodded it with a tentative forefinger.

"So the basis is electrical?" I said to Dixon.

He picked up a bottle of some grey concoction and measured a little into a beaker. "It may be. On the other hand, it may be chemical. You don't think I am going to let you into *all* my secrets, do you?"

When he had finished his preparations he said: "Satisfied, Mr. Weston? I'd rather not be accused later on of having shown you a conjuring trick."

"It doesn't seem to be alive," Alfred admitted, cautiously.

We watched Dixon attach several electrodes to it. Then he carefully chose three spots on its surface and injected in each from a syringe containing a pale blue liquid. Next, he sprayed the whole form twice from different atomizers. Finally, he closed four or five switches in rapid succession.

"Now," he said, with a slight smile, "we wait for five minutes —which you may spend, if you like, in deciding which, or how many, of my actions were critical."

After three minutes the flaccid mass began to pulsate feebly. Gradually the movement increased until gentle, rhythmic undulations were running through it. Presently it half sagged or rolled to one side, exposing the hand that had been hidden beneath it. I saw the fingers of the hand tense, and try to clutch at the smooth tabletop.

I think I cried out. Until it actually happened, I had been unable to believe that it would. Now some part of the meaning of the thing came flooding in on me.

And all the time that fool Alfred kept on poking around the thing as if it were a sideshow at a circus, and he was out to make sure that no one was putting anything across him with mirrors, or working it with bits of string.

It served him right when he got a couple of hundred volts through his fingers . . .

"And now," said Alfred, when he had satisfied himself that at least the grosser forms of deception were ruled out, "now we'd like to see this perfect creature you spoke about."

"Very well," agreed Dixon. "By the way, I call her Una. No name I could think of seemed quite adequate, but she is certainly the first of her kind, so Una she is."

He led us along the room to the last and largest of the row of cages. Standing a little back from the bars, he called the occupant forward.

I don't know what I expected to see—nor quite what Alfred was hoping for. But neither of us had breath for comment when we did see what lumbered towards us.

Dixon's Perfect Creature was a more horrible grotesquerie than I had ever imagined in life or dreams.

Picture, if you can, a dark, conical carapace of some slightly glossy material. The rounded-off peak of the cone stood well over

six feet from the ground: the base was four foot six or more in diameter. The whole thing was supported on three short, cylindrical legs. There were four arms, parodies of human arms, projecting from joints about halfway up.

Eyes, set some six inches below the apex, were regarding us steadily from beneath horny lids. For a moment I felt close to hysterics.

Dixon looked at the thing with pride. "Visitors to see you, Una," he told it.

The eyes turned to me, and then back to Alfred. One of them blinked, with a click from its lid as it closed. A deep, reverberant voice emerged from no obvious source.

"At last! I've been asking you long enough," it said.

"Good heavens!" said Alfred. "That appalling thing can talk?"

The steady gaze dwelt upon him. "That one will do. I like his glass eyes," rumbled the voice.

"Be quiet, Una. This isn't what you think," Dixon interposed. "I must ask you," he added to us, but looking at Alfred, "to be careful in your comments. Una naturally lacks the ordinary background of experience, but she is aware of her distinction—and of her several physical superiorities. She has a somewhat short temper, and nothing is going to be gained by offending her. It is natural that you should find her appearance a little surprising at first, but I shall explain."

A lecturing note crept into his voice. "After I had discovered my method of animation, my first inclination was to construct an approximately anthropoid form as a convincing demonstration. On second thoughts, however, I decided against mere imitation.

"I resolved to proceed functionally and logically, remedying certain features that seemed to me poorly or weakly designed. It also proved necessary later to make a few modifications for technical and constructional reasons. However, in general, Una is the result of my resolve." He paused, looking fondly at the monstrosity.

"I—er—you did say *logically*?" I inquired.

Alfred delayed for some time before making his comment. He went on staring at the creature which still kept its eyes fixed on him. One could almost see him causing what he likes to think of as his better nature to override mere prejudice. He now rose nobly above his earlier, unsympathetic remark.

"I do not consider it proper to confine so large an animal in such restricted quarters," he announced.

One of the horny eyelids clicked again as it blinked.

"I like him. He means well. He will do," the great voice rumbled.

Alfred wilted a little. After a long experience of patronizing dumb friends, he found it disconcerting to be confronted by a creature that not only spoke, but patronized him as it did so. He returned its steady stare uneasily.

Dixon, disregarding the interruption, resumed: "Probably the first thing that will strike you is that Una has no distinct head. That was one of my earliest rearrangements; the normal head is too exposed and vulnerable. The eyes should be carried high, of course, but there is no practical need whatever for a semi-detached head.

"But in eliminating the head, there was sight to be considered. I therefore gave her three eyes, two of which you can see now, and one which is round the back—though, properly speaking, she has no back. Thus she is easily able to look and focus in any direction without the complicated device of a semi-rotatory head.

"Her general shape almost ensures that any falling or projected object would glance off the reinforced plastic carapace, but it seemed wise to me to insulate the brain from shock as much as possible by putting it where you might expect the stomach, I was thus able to put the stomach higher and allow for a more convenient disposition of the intestines."

"How does it eat?" I put in.

"Her mouth is round the other side," he said shortly. "Now, I have to admit that at first glance the provision of four arms might give an impression of frivolity. However, as I said before, the hand is the perfect tool—*if* it is the right size. So you will see that Una's upper pair are delicate and finely moulded, while the lower are heavily muscular.

"Her respiration may interest you, too. I have used a flow principle. She inhales here, exhales there. An improvement, you must admit.

"As regards the general design, she unfortunately turned out to be considerably heavier than I had expected—slightly over one ton, in fact—and to support that, I had to modify my original plan somewhat. I redesigned the legs and feet rather after the pattern of the elephant's so as to spread the weight, but I'm afraid it is not altogether satisfactory; something will have to be done in the later models to reduce the overall weight.

"The three-legged principle was adopted because it is obvious that the biped must waste quite a lot of muscular energy merely in keeping its balance, and a tripod is not only efficient, but more easily adaptable to uneven surfaces than a four-legged support.

"As regards the reproductory system—"

"Excuse me interrupting," I said, "but with a plastic carapace, and stainless steel bones I don't—er—quite see—"

"One had to supply glandular balance: regulation of the

personality. Something *had* to be done there, though I admit that I'm not quite satisfied that I have done it the best way. I suspect that an approach on parthenogenetic lines would have been . . . However, there it is. And I have promised her a mate. I must say I find it a fascinating speculation—"

"He will do," interrupted the rumbling voice, while the creature continued to gaze fixedly at Alfred.

"Of course," Dixon went on to us, a little hurriedly, "Una has never seen herself to know what she looks like. She probably thinks she—"

"I know what I want," said the deep voice, firmly and loudly. "I want—"

"Yes, yes," Dixon interposed, also loudly. "I'll explain to you about that later."

"But I want—" the voice repeated.

"Will you be quiet!" Dixon shouted fiercely.

The creature gave a slight rumbling protest, but desisted.

Alfred drew himself up with the air of one who, after communing seriously with his principles, is forced into speech.

"I cannot approve of this," he announced. "I will concede that this creature may be your own creation—nevertheless, once created, it becomes, in my opinion, entitled to the same safeguards as any other dumb—er—as any other creature.

"I say nothing whatever about your application of your discovery—except to observe that it seems to me that you have behaved like an irresponsible child let loose with modelling clay, and that you have produced an unholy—and I use that word advisedly—unholy mess; a monstrosity, a perversion. However, I say nothing about that.

"What I do say is that in law this creature can be regarded simply as an unfamiliar species of animal. I intend to report that in my professional opinion it is being confined in too small a cage, and clearly without proper opportunities for exercise. I am not able to judge whether it is being adequately nourished, but it is easy to perceive that it has needs that are not being met. Twice already, when it has attempted to express them to us, you have intimidated it."

"Alfred," I put in, "don't you think that perhaps—" but I was cut short by the creature thrumming like a double bass.

"I think he's wonderful! The way his glass eyes flash! I want him!" It sighed in a kind of deep vibrato that ran along the floor. The sound certainly was extremely mournful, and Alfred's one-track mind pounced on it as additional evidence.

"If that is not the plaint of an unhappy creature," he said, stepping closer to the cage, "then I have never—"

" Look out ! " shouted Dixon, jumping forward.

One of the creature's hands made a darting snatch through the bars. Simultaneously Dixon caught him by the shoulders, and pulled him back. There was a rending of cloth, and three buttons pattered on to the linoleum.

" Phew ! " said Dixon.

For the first time, Alfred looked a little alarmed.

" What— ? " he began.

A deep, threatening sound from the cage obliterated the rest of it.

" Give him to me ! I want him ! " rumbled the voice, angrily.

All four arms caught hold of the bars. Two of them rattled the gate violently. The two visible eyes were fixed unwaveringly on Alfred. He began to show signs of reorienting his outlook. His own eyes opened a little more widely behind his glasses.

" Er—it—it doesn't mean— ? " he started, incredulously.

" Gimme ! " bellowed Una, stamping from one foot to another, and shaking the building as she did so.

Dixon was regarding his achievement with some concern.

" I wonder—I wonder, could I have overdone the hormones a bit ? " he speculated, thoughtfully.

Alfred had begun to get to grips with the idea now. He backed a little further away from the cage. The move did not have a good effect on Una.

" Gimme ! " she cried, like a kind of sepulchral public-address system. " Gimme ! Gimme ! "

It was an intimidating sound.

" Mightn't it be better if we— ? " I suggested.

" Perhaps, in the circumstances—" Dixon agreed.

" Yes ! " said Alfred, quite decisively.

The pitch on which Una operated made it difficult to be certain of the finer shades of feeling; the window-rattling wail that occurred behind us as we moved off might have expressed anger, or anguish, or both. We increased our pace a little.

"Alfred ! " called a voice like a disconsolate foghorn. " I want Alfred ! "

Alfred cast a backward glance, and stepped out a trifle more smartly.

There was a thump which rattled the bars and shook the building.

I looked round to see Una in the act of retiring to the back of her cage with the obvious intention of making another onslaught. We ran for the door. Alfred was first through.

A thunderous crash sounded at the other end of the room. As Dixon was closing the door behind us I had a glimpse of Una carrying bars and furnishings before her like a runaway bus.

" I think we shall need some help with her," Dixon said.

Small sparkles of perspiration were standing on Alfred's brow. " You—you don't think it might be better if we were to— ? " he began.

" No," said Dixon. " She'd see you through the windows."

" Oh," said Alfred, unhappily.

Dixon led the way into a large sitting-room, and made for the telephone. He gave urgent messages to the fire-brigade and the police.

" I don't think there's anything we can do till they get here," he said, as he put the receiver down. " The lab wing will probably hold her all right if she isn't tantalized any more."

" Tantalized ! I like that ! " Alfred started to protest, but Dixon went on : " Luckily, being where she is, she couldn't see the door ; so the odds are that she can have no idea of the purpose or nature of doors. What's worrying me most is the damage she's doing in there. Just listen ! "

We did listen for some moments to the muffled sounds of smashing, splintering, and rending. Amongst it there was occasionally a mournful disyllabic boom which might, or might not, have been the word, "Alfred."

Dixon's expression became even more anguished as the noise continued unabated.

"All my records ! All the work of years is in there," he said, bitterly. " Your Society's going to have to pay plenty for this, I warn you—but that won't give me back my records. She was always perfectly docile until your friend excited her—never a moment's trouble with her."

Alfred began to protest again, but was interrupted by the sound of something massive being overturned with a thunderous crash, followed by a noise like a waterfall of broken glass.

" Gimme Alfred ! I want Alfred ! " demanded the stentorian voice.

Alfred half rose, and then sat down agitatedly on the edge of his chair. His eyes flicked nervously hither and thither. He displayed a tendency to bite his finger-nails.

" Ah ! " said Dixon, with a suddenness that startled both of us. "Ah, that must have been it ! I must have calculated the hormone requirement on the overall weight—*including* the carapace. Of course ! What a ridiculous slip to make ! Tch-tch ! I should've done much better to keep to the original parthenogen—Good heavens ! "

The crash that caused his exclamation brought us all to our feet, and across to the door.

Una had discovered the way out of the wing, all right, and come

through it like a bulldozer. Door, frame, and part of the brickwork had come with her. At the moment she was stumbling about amid the resulting mess.

Dixon didn't hesitate. "Quick! Upstairs—that'll beat her," he said.

At the same instant Una spotted us, and let out a boom. We sprinted across the hall for the staircase. Acceleration was our advantage; a freight like Una's takes appreciable time to get under way. I fled up the stairs with Dixon just ahead of me and, I imagined, Alfred just behind.

However, I was not quite right there. I don't know whether Alfred had been momentarily transfixed, or had fumbled his take-off, but when I was at the top I looked back to see him still only a few steps up, with Una thundering in pursuit like a jet-propelled car of Juggernaut.

Alfred kept on coming, though. But so did Una. She may not have been familiar with stairs, nor designed to use them. But she tackled them, for all that. She even got about five or six steps up before they collapsed under her.

Alfred, by then more than halfway up, felt them fall away beneath his feet. He gave a shout as he lost his balance. Then, clawing wildly at the air, he fell backwards.

Una put in as neat a four-armed catch as you could hope to see.

"What co-ordination!" Dixon, behind me, murmured admiringly.

"Help!" bleated Alfred. "Help! Help!"

"Aah!" boomed Una, in a kind of deep diapason of satisfaction.

She backed off a little, with a crunching of timbers.

"Keep calm!" Dixon advised Alfred. "Don't do anything that might startle her."

Alfred, embraced by three arms, and patted affectionately by the fourth, made no immediate reply.

There was a pause for assessment of the situation.

"Well," I said, "we ought to do something. Can't we entice her somehow?"

"It's difficult to know what will distract the triumphant female in her moment of success," observed Dixon.

Una set up a sort of—of—well, if you can imagine an elephant contentedly crooning . . .

"Help!" Alfred bleated again. "She's—*ow*!"

"Calm, calm!" repeated Dixon. "There's probably no real danger. After all, she's a mammal—mostly, that is. Now if she were a quite different kind—"

"I don't think I'd give her any ideas just now," I suggested. "Isn't there a favourite food, or something, we could tempt her with?"

Una was swaying Alfred back and forth in three arms, and prodding him inquisitively with the forefinger of the fourth. Alfred struggled.

"Damn it! Can't you *do* something?" he demanded.

"Oh Alfred, Alfred!" she reproved him, in a kind of besotted rumble.

"Well," Dixon said, doubtfully, "perhaps if we had some ice-cream . . ."

There was a sound of brakes, and vehicles pulling up outside. Dixon ran swiftly along the landing, and I heard him trying to explain the situation through the window to the men outside.

Presently he came back, accompanied by a fireman and his officer. When they looked down into the hall their eyes bulged.

"What we have to do is surround her without scaring her," Dixon was explaining.

"Surround *that*?" said the officer, dubiously. "What on earth is it, anyway?"

"Never mind about that now," Dixon told him, impatiently. "If we can just get a few ropes on to her from different directions—"

"Help!" shouted Alfred. He flailed about violently. Una clasped him more closely to her carapace, and chuckled dotingly. A peculiarly ghastly sound, I thought. It shook the firemen, too.

However, they returned shortly with a coil of rope. And that fireman was good. He spun his noose gently, and dropped it as neatly as you like. When he pulled in, it was round the carapace, below the arms so that it could not slip up. He belayed to the newel-post at the top of the flight.

The front door opened quietly. The faces of a number of assorted firemen and policemen appeared, all with their eyes popping and their jaws dropping.

In that moment Una became aware of what was going on.

"No!" she thundered. "He's mine! I want him!"

A terrified fireman hurled himself back through the door on top of his companions, and it shut behind him. Without turning, Una started off in the same direction. Our rope tightened, and we jumped aside. The newel-post was snapped away like a stick, and the rest of the rope went trailing after it.

Una took the front door like a cruiser-tank. There was an almighty crash, a shower of wood and plaster, and then a screen of dust through which came sounds of consternation, topped by a voice rumbling: "He's mine! I want him! He's mine!"

By the time we were able to reach the front windows, Una was already clear of obstructions. We had an excellent view of her galloping down the drive at some ten miles an hour, towing, without

apparent inconvenience, half a dozen or more firemen and policemen who clung grimly to the trailing rope.

Down at the lodge, the guardian had had the presence of mind to close the gates. He dived for personal cover into the bushes while she was still some yards away.

Gates, however, meant nothing to Una ; she shielded Alfred in her arms and kept on going. She staggered slightly at the impact, but they crumpled and went down before her. The collection of constables and firemen was towed into the jumbled ironwork, and tangled there. When Una passed out of sight round the corner only two figures were still clinging heroically to the rope.

There was a sound of engines starting up below. Dixon called to them to wait. We pelted down the back stairs, and were able to fling ourselves upon the fire-engine just as it moved off.

After a quarter-mile the trail led off down a steep, still narrower lane to one side. We had to abandon the fire-engine, and follow on foot.

At the bottom, there is—was—an old pack-horse bridge across the river. It sufficed, I believe, for several centuries of pack-horses, but nothing like Una at full gallop had entered into its builders' calculations. By the time we reached it, the central span was missing, and a fireman was helping a dripping policeman to carry the limp form of Alfred up the bank.

" Where is she ? " Dixon demanded, anxiously.

The fireman looked at him, and then pointed silently to the middle of the river.

"A crane. Send for a crane, at once !" Dixon demanded. But everyone was more interested in emptying the water out of Alfred, and getting to work on him.

The experience has, I'm afraid, permanently altered that *bonhomie* which used to exist between Alfred and all dumb friends. In the forthcoming welter of claims, counter-claims, cross-claims, and civil and criminal charges in great variety, I shall be figuring only as a witness.

But Alfred, who will, of course, appear in several capacities, says that when his charges of assault, abduction, attempted—well, there are several more on the list—when they have been met, he intends to change his profession, as he now finds it difficult to look a cow or, indeed, any female animal, in the eye without a bias that tends to impair his judgment.

* * *

When you have finished reading this copy of ARGOSY, *why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?*

SOLDIERS OF THE QUEEN

With a tow, row, row, row, row, row, row
for the British Grenadiers!

Traditional Song

"Do you reckon," I asked, "upon any support from the French King's troops at Alost?"—"Oh!" said Wellington, "don't mention such fellows! No: I think Blucher and I can do the business." Then, seeing a private soldier of one of our infantry regiments enter the park, gaping about at the statues and images:—"There," he said, pointing at the soldier, "it all depends upon that article whether we can do the business or not. Give me enough of it, and I am sure."

THOMAS CREEVEY, 1768–1838

Foot Slogger

We aren't no thin red 'eroes, nor we aren't no blackguards too,
But single men in barricks, most remarkable like you;
An' if sometimes our conduck isn't all your fancy paints,
Why, single men in barricks don't grow into plaster saints;
While it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Tommy, fall be'ind,"
But it's "Please to walk in front, sir," when there's trouble in the wind—
There's trouble in the wind, my boys, there's trouble in the wind,
O it's "Please to walk in front, sir," when there's trouble in the wind.

RUDYARD KIPLING, *Tommy*

Cavalry Troop

Can anything be sweeter than the warm strength of a good horse between one's knees? Clear of the Lane Jumps without a fall, without any great disorder in the ranks, we break into a walk. The order is given—"March at ease!"

Diamonds of dew sparkle in the grass and the tufts of heather. A rabbit scuttles affrighted from its morning sortie; the birds are in full orchestration. The air is pure and soft, caressing one's cheek with the fondness of a fresh Spring morning, and oh! the exquisite odour of sweating horses, the music of creaking saddlery, swords and rifle buckets.

An infantry regiment on a route march passes by. The cavalry always looks down on the toeys. Now we do so literally. We note their heavy packs and how most of the men are too physically

engrossed in supporting the weight even to glance at us . . .

We have a proper scorn for unmounted troops—a good-humoured scorn, however, for although we remember Balaclava, Omdurman, we also remember the thin red line at Waterloo and in the Peninsula.

"March at attention!"

We approach the barracks. The guard turns out.

Their swords glisten in the sun. It is so difficult not to wink or grin as a favourite comrade rides by! They remain immovable as statues as we ride past them.

"First troop! Ey-ees right!"

"Second troop! Ey-ees right!"

Here and there a solitary trooper, perhaps a small group of men, watch us as we pass, their critical eyes taking in the mud-bespattered horses, the white lather drying on withers and flanks. Swiftly appraising, they assess the amount of grooming that will be necessary to pass the troop officer's later inspection, the amount of work needed to bring back the blue burnish to bits, spurs, swords and sword scabbards.

And oh! the delicious, insidious invitation coming across from the Squadron lines! The homely smell of sizzling bacon! God's in His heaven. All's right with the world!

FRANCIS HEREWARD MAITLAND, *Hussar of the Line*

Top Brass

I am the very pattern of a modern Major-Gineral,
I've information vegetable, animal, and mineral;
I know the kings of England, and I quote the fights historical,
From Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical;
I'm very well acquainted, too, with matters mathematical,
I understand equations, both the simple and quadratical;
About binomial theorem I'm teeming with a lot o' news,
With interesting facts about the square of the hypotenuse.
I'm very good at integral and differential calculus,
I know the scientific names of beings animalculous.
In short, in matters vegetable, animal, and mineral,
I am the very model of a modern Major-Gineral.

W. S. GILBERT, *The Pirates of Penzance*

Blank Cartridges

You can always tell an old soldier by the inside of his holsters and cartridge boxes. The young ones carry pistols and cartridges: the old ones, grub.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, *Arms and the Man*

Iron Rations

The number of women allowed by Government to embark on service are six for every hundred men, inclusive of all Non-Commissioned Officers' wives.

This number is ample and indeed more than sufficient for a light corps, as every officer and soldier who have ever seen service must admit.

From the *Regulations of the 95th Rifle Corps, stationed at Shorncliffe*, 1801

Orders—

The Guards, who had been disembarked, were again re-embarked. Received orders that we were now to go to Gibraltar directly, and not to Minorca.

" What have you got in your bag, Mr. Courier ? "

" Orders, sir."

" And what in the bag behind you, M· ·urier ? "

" Counter-orders, sir."

WILLIAM DYOT, *Diary*

—And How to Deliver Them

In delivering the message be as concise as possible, no matter whether you are understood or not, and gallop back again as fast as you came. To appear the more warlike, you should ride with your sword drawn ; but take care you do not cut your horse's ear off.

F. GROSE, *Advice to Officers and Soldiers of the British Army*

Godspeed

The street sounds to the soldiers' tread,
And out we troop to see :
A single redcoat turns his head,
He turns and looks at me.

My man, from sky to sky's so far,
We never crossed before ;
Such leagues apart the world's ends are,
We're like to meet no more.

What thoughts at heart have you and I
We cannot stop to tell ;
But dead or living, drunk or dry,
Soldier, I wish you well.

A. E. HOUSMAN

★*Two young writers, one the author of the prize novel, " The Beautiful Visit," and the other a young man whose varied career has included investigating the famous haunted rectory of Borley, join forces to produce this eerie and enigmatic tale.*

THREE MILES UP

by ELIZABETH JANE HOWARD and ROBERT AICKMAN

THERE was absolutely nothing like it.

An unoriginal conclusion, and one that he had drawn a hundred times during the last fortnight. Clifford would make some subtle and intelligent comparison, but he, John, could only continue to repeat that it was quite unlike anything else.

It had been Clifford's idea, which, considering Clifford, was surprising. However, John reflected, he had been ill, some sort of breakdown these clever people went in for, and that might account for his uncharacteristic idea of hiring a boat and travelling on canals.

On the whole, John had to admit, it was a good idea. He had never been on a canal in his life, although he had been in almost every kind of boat, and thought he knew a good deal about them. But it was not nearly as simple as he had imagined. Clifford, of course, knew nothing about boats ; but he had admitted that almost everything had gone wrong with a kind of devilish versatility which had almost frightened him.

However, that was all over, and John, who had learned painfully all about the boat and her engine, felt that the former at least had run her gamut of disaster. They had run out of food, out of petrol, and out of water ; had dropped their windlass into the deepest lock, and, more humiliating, their boat-hook into a side pond.

They had been disturbed for one whole night by a curious rustling in the cabin, like a rat in a paper bag, when there was no paper, and, so far as they knew, no rat. The battery had failed. Clifford had put his elbow through an already cracked window in the cabin. A large piece of rope had wound itself round the propeller with a malignant intensity which required three men and half a morning to unravel. And so on, until now there was really nothing left to go wrong, unless one of them drowned, and surely it was impossible to drown in a canal.

" I suppose one might easily drown in a lock ? " he asked aloud.

" We must be careful not to fall into one," Clifford replied.

" What ? " John steered with fierce concentration, and never heard anything people said to him for the first time, almost on principle.

" I said we must be careful not to fall *into* a lock."

" Oh. Well, there aren't any more now until after the Junction. Anyway, we haven't fallen in yet, so there's really no reason why we should start now. I only wanted to know whether we'd drown if we did."

" Sharon might."

" What ? "

" Sharon might."

" Better warn her, then. She seems agile enough." His concentrated frown returned, and he settled down again to the wheel.

John didn't mind where they went, or what happened, so long as he handled the boat, and all things considered, he handled her remarkably well. Clifford planned and John steered : and until two days ago they had both quarrelled and argued over a smoking and unusually temperamental primus. Which reminded Clifford of Sharon. Her advent and the weather were really their two unadulterated strokes of good fortune.

There had been no rain, and Sharon had, as it were, dropped from the blue on to the boat, where she speedily restored domestic order, stimulated evening conversation, and touched the whole venture with her attractive being : the requisite number of miles each day were achieved, the boat behaved herself, and admirable meals were steadily and regularly prepared.

She had identified herself with the journey, without making any effort to control it : a talent which many women were supposed in theory to possess, when, in fact, Clifford reflected gloomily, most of them were bored with the whole thing, or tried to dominate it.

Her advent was a remarkable, almost a miraculous, piece of luck. He had, after a particularly ill-fed day, and their failure to dine at a small hotel, desperately telephoned all the women he knew who seemed in the least suitable (and they were surprisingly few), with no success.

They had spent a miserable evening, John determined to argue about everything, and Clifford, refusing to speak ; until both in a fine state of emotional tension, they had turned in for the night. While John snored, Clifford had lain distraught, his resentment and despair circling round John and then touching his own smallest and most random thoughts ; until his mind found no refuge and he was left, divided from it, hostile and afraid, watching it in terror racing on in the dark like some malignant machine utterly out of his control.

The next day things had proved no better between them, and they

had continued throughout the morning in a silence which was only occasionally and elaborately broken. They had tied up for lunch beside a wood, which hung heavy and magnificent over the canal. There was a small clearing beside which John then proposed to moor, but Clifford failed to achieve the considerable leap necessary to stop the boat ; and they had drifted helplessly past it. John flung him a line, but it was not until the boat was secured, and they were safely in the cabin, that the storm had broken. John, in attempting to light the primus, spilt a quantity of paraffin on Clifford's bunk.

Instantly all his despair of the previous evening had contracted. He hated John so much that he could have murdered him. They both lost their tempers, and for the ensuing hour and a half had conducted a blazing quarrel, which, even at the time, secretly horrified them both in its intensity.

It had finally ended with John striding out of the cabin, there being no more to say. He had returned almost at once, however.

" I say, Clifford. Come and look at this."

" At what ? "

" Outside, on the bank."

For some unknown reason Clifford did get up and did look. Lying face downwards quite still on the ground, with her arms clasping the trunk of a large tree, was a girl.

" How long has she been there ? "

" She's asleep."

" She can't have been asleep all the time. She must have heard some of what we said."

" Anyway, who is she ? What is she doing here ? "

Clifford looked at her again. She was wearing a dark twill shirt and dark trousers, and her hair hung over her face, so that it was almost invisible. " I don't know. I suppose she's alive ? "

John jumped cautiously ashore. " Yes, she's alive all right. Funny way to lie."

" Well, it's none of our business anyway. Anyone can lie on a bank if they want to."

" Yes, but she must have come in the middle of our row, and it does seem queer to stay, and then go to sleep."

" Extraordinary," said Clifford wearily. Nothing was really extraordinary, he felt, nothing. " Are we moving on ? "

" Let's eat first. I'll do it."

" Oh, I'll do it."

The girl stirred, unclasped her arms, and sat up. They had all stared at each other for a moment, the girl slowly pushing the hair from her forehead. Then she had said : " If you will give me a meal, I'll cook it."

Afterwards they had left her to wash up, and walked about the

wood, while Clifford suggested to John that they ask the girl to join them. " I'm sure she'd come," he said. " She didn't seem at all clear about what she was doing."

" We can't just pick somebody up out of a wood," said John, scandalized.

" Where do you suggest we pick them up ? If we don't have someone, this holiday will be a failure."

" We don't know anything about her."

" I can't see that that matters very much. She seems to cook well. We can at least ask her."

" All right. Ask her then. She won't come."

When they returned to the boat, she had finished the washing up, and was sitting on the floor of the cockpit, with her arms stretched behind her head. Clifford asked her ; and she accepted as though she had known them a long time and they were simply inviting her to tea.

" Well, but look here," said John, thoroughly taken aback. " What about your things ? "

" My things ? " she looked inquiringly and a little defensively from one to the other.

" Clothes and so on. Or haven't you got any ? Are you a gipsy or something ? Where do you come from ? "

" I am not a gipsy," she began patiently ; when Clifford, thoroughly embarrassed and ashamed, interrupted her.

" Really, it's none of our business who you are, and there is absolutely no need for us to ask you anything. I'm very glad you will come with us, although I feel we should warn you that we are new to this life, and anything might happen."

" No need to warn me," she said and smiled gratefully at him.

After that, they both felt bound to ask her nothing ; John because he was afraid of being made to look foolish by Clifford, and Clifford because he had stopped John.

" Good Lord, we shall never get rid of her ; and she'll fuss about condensation," John had muttered aggressively as he started the engine.

But she was very young, and did not fuss about anything. She had settled down, immediately and easily : gentle, assured, and remarkably unselfconscious. They were never sure how much she had overheard them, for she gave no sign of having heard anything. A friendly but uncommunicative creature.

The map on the engine box started to flap, and immediately John asked, " Where are we ? "

" I haven't been watching, I'm afraid. Wait a minute."

" We just passed under a railway bridge," John said helpfully.

"Right. Yes. About four miles from the Junction, I think. What is the time?"

"Five-thirty."

"Which way are we going when we get to the Junction?"

"We haven't time for the big loop. I must be back in London by the 15th."

"The alternative is to go up as far as the basin, and then simply turn round and come back, and who wants to do that?"

"Well, we'll know the route then. It'll be much easier coming back."

Clifford did not reply. He was not attracted by the route being easier, and he wanted to complete his original plan.

"Let us wait till we get there." Sharon appeared with tea and marmalade sandwiches.

"All right, let's wait." Clifford was relieved.

"It will be almost dark by six-thirty. I think we ought to have a plan," John said. "Thank you, Sharon."

"Have tea first." She curled herself on to the floor with her back to the cabin doors and a mug in her hands.

They were passing rows of little houses with gardens that backed on to the canal. They were long narrow strips, streaked with cinder paths, and crowded with vegetables and chicken huts, fruit trees and perambulators; sometimes ending with fat white ducks, and sometimes in a tiny patch of grass with a bench on it.

"Would you rather keep ducks or sit on a bench?" asked Clifford.

"Keep ducks," said John promptly. "More useful. Sharon wouldn't mind which she did. Would you, Sharon?" He liked saying her name, Clifford noticed. "You could be happy anywhere, couldn't you?" He seemed to be presenting her with the widest possible choice.

"I might *be* anywhere," she answered after a moment's thought.

"Well you happen to be on a canal, and very nice for us."

"In a wood, and then on a canal," she replied contentedly, bending her smooth dark head over her mug.

"Going to be fine tomorrow," said John. He was always a little embarrassed at any mention of how they found her and his subsequent rudeness.

"Yes. I like it when the whole sky is so red and burning and it begins to be cold."

"*Are* you cold?" said John, wanting to worry about it: but she tucked her dark shirt into her trousers and answered composedly:

"Oh no. I am never cold."

They drank their tea in a comfortable silence. Clifford started to

read his map, and then said they were almost on to another sheet. " New country," he said with satisfaction. " I've never been here before."

" You make it sound like an exploration ; doesn't he, Sharon ? " said John.

" Is that a bad thing ? " She collected the mugs. " I am going to put these away. You will call me if I am wanted for anything." And she went into the cabin again.

There was a second's pause, a minute tribute to her departure ; and, lighting cigarettes, they settled down to stare at the long silent stretch of water ahead.

John thought about Sharon. He thought rather desperately that really they still knew nothing about her, and that when they went back to London, they would, in all probability, never see her again. Perhaps Clifford would fall in love with her, and she would naturally reciprocate, because she was so young and Clifford was reputed to be so fascinating and intelligent, and because women were always foolish and loved the wrong man.

He thought all these things with equal intensity, glanced at Clifford, and supposed he was thinking about her ; then wondered what she would be like, clad in anything else but her dark trousers and shirt. The engine coughed and he turned to it in relief.

Clifford was making frantic calculations of time and distance ; stretching their time, and diminishing the distance, and groaning that with the utmost optimism they could not be made to fit. He was interrupted by John swearing at the engine, and then for no particular reason he remembered Sharon, and reflected with pleasure how easily she left the mind when she was not present, how she neither obsessed nor possessed one in her absence, but was charming to see.

The sun had almost set when they reached the Junction, and John slowed down to neutral while they made up their minds. To the left was the straight cut which involved the longer journey originally planned ; and curving away to the right was the short arm which John advocated. The canal was fringed with rushes, and there was one small cottage with no light in it.

Clifford went into the cabin to tell Sharon where they were, and then, as they drifted slowly in the middle of the Junction, John suddenly shouted : " Clifford ! What's the third turning ? "

" There are only two." Clifford reappeared. " Sharon is busy with dinner."

" No, look. Surely that is another cut."

Clifford stared ahead. " Can't see it."

" Just to the right of the cottage. Look. It's not so dark as all that."

Then Clifford saw it very plainly. It seemed to wind away from

the cottage on a fairly steep curve, and the rushes shrouding it from anything but the closest view were taller than the rest.

" Have another look at the map. I'll reverse for a bit."

" Found it. It's just another arm. Probably been abandoned," said Clifford eventually.

The boat had swung round, and now they could see the continuance of the curve dully gleaming ahead, and banked by reeds.

" Well, what shall we do ? "

" Getting dark. Let's go up a little way, and moor. Nice quiet mooring."

" With some nice quiet mudbanks," John replied grimly. " Nobody uses that."

" How do you know ? "

" Well, look at it. All those rushes, and it's sure to be thick with weed."

" Don't go up it, then. But we shall go aground if we drift about like this."

" *I* don't mind going up it," said John doggedly. " What about Sharon ? "

" What about her ? "

" Tell her about it."

" We've found a third turning," Clifford called above the noise of the primus through the cabin door.

" One you had not expected ? "

" Yes. It looks very wild. We were thinking of going up it."

" Didn't you say you wanted to explore ? " she smiled at him.

" You are quite ready to try it ? I warn you we shall probably run hard aground. Look out for bumps with the primus."

" I am quite ready, and I am quite sure we shan't run aground," she answered with charming confidence in their skill.

They moved slowly forward in the dusk. Why they did not run aground, Clifford could not imagine : John really was damned good at it. The canal wound and wound, and the reeds grew not only thick on each bank, but in clumps across the canal. The light drained out of the sky into the water and slowly drowned there ; the trees and the banks became heavy and black.

Clifford began to clear things away from the heavy dew which had begun to rise. After two journeys he remained in the cabin, while John crawled on, alone. Once, on a bend, John thought he saw a range of hills ahead with lights on them, but when he was round the curve and had time to look again, he could see no hills : only a dark indeterminate waste of country stretching ahead.

He was beginning to consider the necessity of mooring, when they came to a bridge ; and shortly after, he saw a dark mass which he

took to be houses. When the boat had crawled for another fifty yards, he stopped the engine, and drifted in absolute silence to the bank.

The houses, about half a dozen of them, were much nearer than he had at first imagined, but there were no lights to be seen. Distance is always deceptive in the dark, he thought, and jumped ashore with a bow line.

When, a few minutes later, he took a sounding with the boat-hook the water proved unexpectedly deep; and he concluded that they had by incredible good fortune moored at the village wharf. He made everything fast, and joined the others in the cabin with mixed feelings of pride and resentment; that he should have achieved so much under such difficult conditions, and that they—by "they" he meant Clifford—should have contributed so little towards the achievement.

He found Clifford reading Bradshaw's *Guide to the Canals and Navigable Rivers* in one corner, and Sharon, with her hair pushed back behind her ears, bending over the primus with a knife. Her ears are pale, exactly the colour of her face, he thought; wanted to touch them; then felt horribly ashamed, and hated Clifford.

"Let's have a look at Bradshaw," he said, as though he had not noticed Clifford reading it.

But Clifford handed him the book in the most friendly manner, remarking that he couldn't see where they were. "In fact, you have surpassed yourself with your brilliant navigation. We seem to be miles from anywhere."

"What about your famous ordnance maps?"

"It's not on any sheet I have. The new one I thought we should use only covers the loop we planned. There is precisely three-quarters of a mile of this canal shown on the present sheet and then we run off the map. I suppose there must once have been trade here, but I cannot imagine what, or where."

"I expect things change," said Sharon. "Here is the meal."

"How can you see to cook?" asked John, eyeing his plate ravenously.

"There is a candle."

"Yes, but we've selfishly appropriated that."

"Should I need more light?" she asked, and looked troubled.

"There's no should about it. I just don't know how you do it, that's all. Chips exactly the right colour, and you never drop anything. It's marvellous."

She smiled a little uncertainly at him and lit another candle. "Luck, probably," she said, and set it on the table.

They ate their meal, and John told them about the mooring. "Some sort of village. I think we're moored at the wharf. I couldn't find any rings without the torch, so I've used the anchor."

This small shaft was intended for Clifford, who had dropped the

spare battery in the washing-up bowl, and forgotten to buy another. But it was only a small shaft, and immediately afterwards John felt better. His aggression slowly left him, and he felt nothing but a peaceful and well-fed affection for the other two.

" Extraordinary how cut off this is," he remarked over coffee.

" It is very pleasant in here. Warm, and extremely full of us."

" Yes, I know. A quiet village, though, you must admit."

" I shall believe in your village when I see it."

" Then you would believe it ? "

" No, he wouldn't, Sharon. Not if he didn't want to, and couldn't find it on the map. That map ! "

The conversation turned again to their remoteness, and to how cut off one liked to be and at what point it ceased to be desirable ; to boats, telephones, and, finally, canals : which, Clifford maintained possessed the perfect proportions of urbanity and solitude.

Hours later, when they had turned in for the night, Clifford reviewed the conversation, together with others they had had, and remembered with surprise how little Sharon had actually said. She listened to everything and occasionally, when they appealed to her, made some small composed remark which was oddly at variance with their passionate interest.

" She has an elusive quality of freshness about her," he thought, " which is neither naïve nor stupid nor dull, and she invokes no responsibility. She does not want us to know what she was, or why we found her as we did, and curiously, I at least do not want to know. She is what women ought to be," he concluded with sudden pleasure ; and slept.

He woke the next morning to find it very late, and stretched out his hand to wake John.

" We've all overslept. Look at the time."

" Good Lord ! Better wake Sharon."

Sharon lay between them on the floor, which they had ceded her because, oddly enough, it was the widest and most comfortable bed. She seemed profoundly asleep, but at the mention of her name sat up immediately, and rose almost as though she had not been asleep at all.

The morning routine, which, involving the clothing of three people and shaving of two of them, was necessarily a long and complicated business, began. Sharon boiled water, and Clifford, grumbling gently, hoisted himself out of his bunk and repaired with a steaming jug to the cockpit. He put the jug on a seat, lifted the canvas awning, and leaned out.

It was absolutely grey and still ; a little white mist hung over the canal, and the country stretched out desolate and unkempt on every

side with no sign of a living creature.

" The village," he thought suddenly : " John's village," and was possessed of a perilous uncertainty and fear. " I am getting worse," he thought, " this holiday is doing me no good. I am mad. I imagined that he said we moored by a village wharf."

For several seconds he stood gripping the gunwale, and searching desperately for anything, huts, a clump of trees, which could in the darkness have been mistaken for a village. But there was nothing near the boat except tall rank rushes which did not move at all. Then John joined him with another steaming jug of water.

" We shan't get anywhere at this rate," he began ; and then— " Hullo ! Where's my village ? "

" I was wondering that," said Clifford. He could almost have wept with relief, and quickly began to shave, deeply ashamed of his private panic.

" Can't understand it," John was saying. It was no joke, Clifford decided, as he listened to his hearty puzzled ruminations.

At breakfast John continued to speculate upon what he had or had not seen, and Sharon listened intently while she filled the coffee pot and cut bread. Once or twice she met Clifford's eye with a glance of discreet amusement.

" I must be mad, or else the whole place is haunted," finished John comfortably. These two possibilities seemed to relieve him of any further anxiety in the matter, as he ate a huge breakfast and set about greasing the engine.

" Well," said Clifford, when he was alone with Sharon, " what do you make of that ? "

" It is easy to be deceived in such matters," she answered perfunctorily.

" Evidently. Still, John is an unlikely candidate, you must admit. Here, I'll help you dry."

" Oh no. It is what I am here for."

" Not entirely, I hope."

" Not entirely." She smiled and relinquished the cloth.

John eventually announced that they were ready to start. Clifford, who had assumed that they were turning back, was surprised and a little alarmed, to find John intent upon going on. He seemed undeterred by the state of the canal, which, as Clifford immediately pointed out, rendered navigation both arduous and unrewarding. He announced that the harder it was, the more he liked it, adding very firmly, " Anyway, we must see what happens."

" We shan't have time to do anything else."

" Thought you wanted to explore."

" I do, but . . . What do you think, Sharon ? "

" I think John will have to be a very good navigator to manage

that." She indicated the rush and weed-ridden reach before them. " Do you think it's possible ? "

" Of course it's possible. I'll probably need some help though."

" I'll help you," she said.

So on they went.

They made incredibly slow progress. John enjoys showing off to her, thought Clifford, half amused, half exasperated, as he struggled for the fourth time in an hour to scrape weeds off the propeller.

Sharon eventually retired to cook lunch.

" Surprising amount of water here," John said suddenly.

" Oh ? "

" Well, I mean, with all this weed and stuff, you'd expect the canal to have silted up. I'm sure nobody uses it."

" The whole thing is extraordinary."

" Is it the wrong time of year for birds ? " asked Clifford later.

" No, I don't think so. Why ? "

" I haven't heard one, have you ? "

" Haven't noticed, I'm afraid. There's someone, anyway. First sign of life."

An old man stood near the bank watching them. He was dressed in corduroy and wore a straw hat.

" Good morning," shouted John, as they drew nearer.

He made no reply, but inclined his head slightly. He seemed very old. He was leaning on a scythe, and as they drew almost level with him, he turned away and began slowly cutting rushes. A pile of them lay neatly stacked beside him.

" Where does this go ? " " Is there a village further on ?" Clifford and John asked simultaneously.

He seemed not to hear, and as they chugged steadily past, Clifford was about to suggest that they stop and ask again, when he called after them : " Three miles up you'll find the village. Three miles up that is," and turned away to his rushes again.

" Well, now we know something, anyway," said John.

" We don't even know what the village is called."

" Soon find out. Only three miles."

" Three miles ! " said Clifford darkly. " That might mean anything."

" Do you want to turn back ? "

" Oh, no, not now. I want to see this village now. My curiosity is thoroughly aroused."

" Shouldn't think there'll be anything to see. Never been in such a wild spot. Look at it."

Clifford looked at it. Half wilderness, half marsh, dank and grey and still, with single trees bare of their leaves ; clumps of hawthorn

that might once have been hedge, sparse and sharp with berries; and, in the distance, hills and an occasional wood; these were all one could see, beyond the lines of rushes which edged the canal winding ahead.

They stopped for a lengthy meal, which Sharon described as lunch and tea together, it being so late; and then, appalled at how little daylight was left, continued.

"We've hardly been any distance at all," said John forlornly. "Good thing there were no locks. I shouldn't think they'd have worked if there were."

"*Much* more than three miles," he said, about two hours later. Darkness was descending and it was becoming very cold.

"Better stop," said Clifford.

"Not yet. I'm determined to reach that village."

"Dinner is ready," said Sharon sadly. "It will be cold."

"Let's stop."

"You have your meal. I'll call if I want you."

Sharon looked at them, and Clifford shrugged his shoulders. "Come on. I will. I'm tired of this."

They shut the cabin doors. John could hear the pleasant clatter of their meal, and just as he was coming to the end of the decent interval which he felt must elapse before he gave in, they passed under a bridge, the first of the day, and, clutching at any straw, he immediately assumed that it prefaced the village. "I think we're nearly there," he called.

Clifford opened the door. "The village?"

"No, a bridge. Can't be far now."

"You're mad, John. It's pitch dark."

"You can see the bridge, though."

"Yes. Why not moor under it?"

"Too late. Can't turn round in this light, and she's not good at reversing. Must be nearly there. You go back, I don't need you."

Clifford shut the door again. He was beginning to feel irritated with John behaving in this childish manner and showing off to impress Sharon. It was amusing in the morning, but really he was carrying it a bit far. Let him manage the thing himself then. When, a few minutes later, John shouted that they had reached the sought-after village, Clifford merely pulled back the little curtain over a cabin window, rubbed the condensation, and remarked that he could see nothing. "No light, at least."

"He is happy anyhow," said Sharon peaceably.

"Going to have a look round," said John, slamming the cabin doors and blowing his nose.

"Surely you'll eat first?"

" If you've left anything. My God it's cold ! It's *unnaturally* cold."

" We won't be held responsible if he dies of exposure, will we ? " said Clifford.

She looked at him, hesitated a moment, but did not reply, and placed a steaming plate in front of John. She doesn't want us to quarrel, Clifford thought, and with an effort of friendliness he asked : " What does tonight's village look like ? "

" Much the same. Only one or two houses, you know. But the old man called it a village."

He seemed uncommunicative ; Clifford thought he was sulking. But after eating the meal, he suddenly announced, almost apologetically, " I don't think I shall walk round. I'm absolutely worn out. You go if you like. I shall start turning in."

" All right. I'll have a look. You've had a hard day."

Clifford pulled on a coat and went outside. It was, as John said, incredibly cold and almost overwhelmingly silent. The clouds hung very low over the boat, and mist was rising everywhere from the ground, but he could dimly discern the black huddle of cottages lying on a little slope above the bank against which the boat was moored. He did actually set foot on shore, but his shoe sank immediately into a marshy hole. He withdrew it, and changed his mind. The prospect of groping round those dark and silent houses became suddenly distasteful, and he joined the others with the excuse that it was too cold and that he also was tired.

A little later, he lay half-conscious in a kind of restless trance, with John sleeping heavily opposite him. His mind seemed full of foreboding, fear of something unknown and intangible : he thought of them lying in warmth on the cold secret canal with desolate miles of water behind and probably beyond ; the old man and the silent houses ; John, cut off and asleep, and Sharon, who lay on the floor beside him.

Immediately he was filled with a sudden and most violent desire for her, even to touch her, for her to know that he was awake.

" Sharon," he whispered, " Sharon, Sharon," and stretched down his fingers to her in the dark.

Instantly her hand was in his, each smooth and separate finger warmly clasped. She did not move or speak, but his relief was indescribable and for a long while he lay in an ecstasy of delight and peace, until his mind slipped imperceptibly with her fingers into oblivion.

When he woke he found John absent and Sharon standing over the primus. " He's outside," she said.

" Have I overslept again ? "

" It is late. I am boiling water for you now."

" We'd better try and get some supplies this morning."

" There is no village," she said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

" What ? "

" John says not. But we have enough food, if you don't mind this queer milk from a tin."

" No, I don't mind," he replied, watching her affectionately. " It doesn't really surprise me," he added after a moment.

" The village ? "

" No village. Yesterday I should have minded awfully. Is that you, do you think ? "

" Perhaps."

" It doesn't surprise you about the village at all, does it ? Do you love me ? "

She glanced at him quickly, a little shocked, and said quietly : " Don't you know ? " then added, " It doesn't surprise me."

John seemed very disturbed. " I don't like it," he kept saying as they shaved. " Can't understand it at all. I could have sworn there were houses last night. You saw them didn't you ? "

" Yes."

" Well, don't you think it's very odd ? "

" I do."

" It looks the same as yesterday morning. I don't like it."

" It's an adventure, you must admit."

" Yes, but I've had enough of it. I suggest we turn back."

Sharon suddenly appeared, and, seeing her, Clifford knew that he did not want to go back. He remembered her saying : " Didn't you say you wanted to explore ? " She would think him weak-hearted if they turned back all those dreary miles with nothing to show for it. At breakfast, he exerted himself in persuading John to the same opinion. John finally agreed to one more day, but, in turn, extracted a promise that they would then go back, whatever happened.

Clifford agreed to this, and Sharon for some inexplicable reason laughed at them both. So that eventually they prepared to set off in an atmosphere of general good humour.

Sharon began to fill the water tank with their four-gallon can. It seemed too heavy for her, and John dropped the starter and leapt to her assistance.

She let him take the can and held the funnel for him. Together they watched the rich even stream of water disappear.

" You shouldn't try to do that," he said. " You'll hurt yourself."

" Gipsies do it," she said.

" I'm awfully sorry about that. You know I am."

" I should not have minded if you had thought I was a gipsy."

" I do like you," he said, not looking at her. " I do like you. You won't disappear altogether when this is over, will you ? "

" You probably won't find I'll disappear for good," she replied comfortingly.

" Come on," shouted Clifford.

It's all right for *him* to talk to her, John thought, as he struggled to swing the starter ; he just doesn't like me doing it. And he wished, as he had begun often to do, that Clifford was not there.

They had spasmodic engine trouble in the morning, which slowed them down ; and the consequent halts, with the difficulty they experienced of mooring anywhere (the banks seemed nothing but marsh), were depressing and cold.

Their good spirits evaporated : by lunch-time John was plainly irritable and frightened, and Clifford had begun to hate the grey silent land on either side, with the woods and hills which remained so consistently distant. They both wanted to give it up by then, but John felt bound to stick to his promise, and Clifford was secretly sure that Sharon wished to continue.

While she was preparing another late lunch, they saw a small boy who stood on what once had been the tow-path watching them. He was bare-headed, wore corduroys, and had no shoes. He held a long reed, the end of which he chewed as he stared at them.

" Ask him where we are," said John ; and Clifford asked.

He took the reed out of his mouth, but did not reply.

" Where do you live then ? " asked Clifford as they drew almost level with him.

" I told you. Three miles up," he said ; and then he gave a sudden little shriek of fear, dropped the reed, and turned to run down the bank the way they had come. Once he looked back, stumbled and fell, picked himself up sobbing, and ran faster.

Sharon had appeared with lunch a moment before, and together they listened to his gasping cries growing fainter and fainter, until he had run himself out of their sight.

" What on earth frightened him ? " said Clifford.

" I don't know. Unless it was Sharon popping out of the cabin like that."

" Nonsense. But he was a very frightened little boy. And, I say, do you realize—? "

" He was a very foolish little boy," Sharon interrupted. She was angry, Clifford noticed with surprise, really angry, white and trembling, and with a curious expression which he did not like.

" We might have got something out of him," said John sadly.

" Too late now," Sharon said. She had quite recovered herself.

They saw no one else. They journeyed on throughout the afternoon ; it grew colder, and at the same time more and more airless

and still. When the light began to fail, Sharon disappeared as usual to the cabin. The canal became more tortuous, and John asked Clifford to help him with the turns. Clifford complied unwillingly : he did not want to leave Sharon, but as it had been he who had insisted on their continuing, he could hardly refuse. The turns were nerve-wracking, as the canal was very narrow and the light grew worse and worse.

" All right if we stop soon ? " asked John eventually.

" Stop now if you like."

" Well, we'll try and find a tree to tie up to. This swamp is awful. Can't think how that child ran."

" That child . . ." began Clifford anxiously ; but John, who had been equally unnerved by the incident, and did not want to think about it, interrupted, " Is there a tree ahead anywhere ? "

" Can't see one. There's a hell of a bend coming, though. Almost back on itself. Better slow a bit more."

" Can't. We're right down as it is."

They crawled round, clinging to the outside bank, which seemed always to approach them, its rushes to rub against their bows, although the wheel was hard over. John grunted with relief, and they both stared ahead for the next turn.

They were presented with the most terrible spectacle.

The canal immediately broadened, until no longer a canal but a sheet, an infinity, of water stretched ahead ; oily, silent, and still, as far as the eye could see, with no country edging it, nothing but water to the low grey sky above it. John had almost immediately cut out the engine, and now he tried desperately to start it again, in order to turn round. Clifford instinctively glanced behind them. He saw no canal at all, no inlet, but grasping and close to the stern of the boat, the reeds and rushes of a marshy waste closing in behind them.

He stumbled to the cabin doors and pulled them open. It was very neat and tidy in there, but empty. Only one stern door of the cabin was free of its catch, and it flapped irregularly backwards and forwards with their movements in the boat.

There was no sign of Sharon at all.

* * *

SHARE CROPPING

Investment brokers, in old worn tweeds,
Spading the humus by garden walks,
Have no voice in the choice of seeds—
What else can they plant but common stocks?

ROD MACLEAN

VIRTUOSO

At last, after two years of waiting, he drew a deep breath and began to play . . .

by VINCENT SHEEAN

KRAKOVSKY lived in a crowded apartment out in the grey wastes of Charlottenburg, not far from the Olivärplatz. His wants were attended to by a silent, elderly female called Amalie, who according to tradition had once been something more than a housekeeper to him; her present status was something less than that. Krakovsky treated her, according to his whim of the moment, as an article of furniture, a bond slave, or the convenient butt of his rather clumsy witticisms.

For reasons best known to herself, Amalie adored him; and there were persons qualified to judge who said that Amalie's devotion was the best thing they knew about her master.

Except, that is, his rare and irresistible genius as an interpreter of nineteenth-century piano music; in this few people in the past four decades found much fault with Eugen Krakovsky. The round little man with the pudgy fingers, so pompous and perfumed and self-satisfied, fell heir to all the poetry of the romantic era when he sat down to play. From Mendelssohn through Schumann and Chopin and Liszt—up to and including some of the piano music of Brahms—the works of two or three generations of composers seemed to have been written especially for his performance.

He had the two primary requirements for interpretation of such music—agility of technique and beauty of tone—to the highest possible degree. For music of more austere pattern he had no gift, and, indeed, no patience; his taste and his talents were marvellously adjusted to each other, so that he was never tortured by the desire to reach heights which were beyond him.

It used to be said of him that he could play "faster than any pianist who ever lived," and however ironically the comment may have been intended in the first place, Krakovsky had long accepted it as a tribute to his genius.

For years it had been an article of faith with him that his technique on the piano had no equal in the world. With that assurance firmly lodged in his mind and heart, he could afford to be generously condescending towards those inferior creatures, the other pianists of

the century. Often he went so far as to say to them after a particularly good performance : " I could not have done better myself." These words were delivered with such a patronizing smile that they deceived nobody ; it was clear that he knew the statement to be impossible, and that only his greatness of spirit produced the extravagant compliment.

Krakovsky had just given a recital in Chicago when Marco Charitakis came to see him. Charitakis was a Greek, very tall and handsome, who enraptured concert audiences as much by his looks as by his performances on the piano.

He was, perhaps, too intelligent to be a really first-rate virtuoso, but he was much admired by piano students and old ladies with a fondness for music. He was witty ; he was even subtle. He had studied in Berlin, and Krakovsky knew him well enough to be slightly uncomfortable in his presence. Charitakis took a malicious pleasure in making remarks which he knew Krakovsky could not understand, and in bestowing compliments so fulsome that they made even Krakovsky doubt his sincerity.

They talked to each other in fluent, execrable German and French ; Krakovsky with the heavy, trailing accent of the Polish Jew, and Charitakis with the lisping elegance of the Greek.

" *Ah, Maître !* " said Charitakis, taking Krakovsky's hand. " *Que c'était merveilleux ! Comme vous avez joué aujourd'hui ! Es war wirklich ausgezeichnet, wissen Sie—seit Liszt hat niemand so grossartig Liszt gespielt !* "

This kind of jargon was Krakovsky's accustomed medium of communication with the world, and he answered in kind. They were standing on the stage of Orchestra Hall, where Krakovsky's recital had just ended, and where Charitakis was to play two days later. Around them milled the ladies and gentlemen of musical Chicago, ready to shake the virtuoso's hand and ask him if he would not come on to a little party—" really just a small party, you know ; only musical people will be there "—after he had rested a bit. Krakovsky was glowing with pleasure. He had played the Liszt sonata and the Brahms-Paganini variations, among other things, and had finished off the Polonaise in A flat as an encore ; his fingers still tingled with excitement.

" You are very gracious," he said to Charitakis, failing to observe the twinkle in that gentleman's large brown eyes. " And this from you—such an artist ! I tell you what, Charitakis, come to the hotel with me after this is over and have a drink. I have got some beer which was brewed before Prohibition was taken off ; it's not bad. Perhaps I shall play some more for you. It was good today, eh ? The old man can still play faster, eh ? "

He chuckled and gave his hand to a lady who had been hovering

over him. Charitakis—after an explosive acceptance of Krakovsky's invitation—turned and walked towards the stage door.

" Go on home, my dear," he said to his wife. " The old fool has asked me to come to his hotel and have a glass of beer. The Tsar himself could not have been more condescending. He says he may even play for me."

" He is an impertinent old camel," said Mme. Charitakis with venom. She was a fat Frenchwoman with many diamonds and a flour-covered face. " I am sure you play a thousand times better than he does, my love. Why do you waste time on him ? "

" Perhaps he amuses me," said Charitakis, smiling. " I might tell him your opinion of our relative merits and see the sparks fly. Depend upon it, I shall not be bored."

" *Soit*," said Mme. Charitakis. " But remember not to be late for dinner. We have an engagement with some of the adoring ladies of Chicago, and they are not likely to welcome me without you."

Charitakis stood near the door and waited another fifteen minutes until Krakovsky had absorbed the last compliment, declined the last invitation, and entrusted his invaluable fingers to the last eager music-loving hand. Then the two pianists made their way out to the older virtuoso's waiting car.

They were a rather startling contrast as they went down the long corridor towards Michigan Avenue. Marco Charitakis, suave and handsome in his over-elegant clothes by French tailors, towered above the plump little figure beside him. Krakovsky, still excited by the concert and his own glory, talked incessantly, waved his hands, made faces. It mattered very little to him whether Charitakis listened or not—whether, indeed, it was Charitakis or another who strode along beside him. The exaltation of the performance had not subsided yet, and until it did Krakovsky was beyond noticing such trivial details.

" What a house ! " he was saying. " Did you see how crowded it was ? And all genuine sales, too, my friend—all of the seats were paid for. And how they listened ! I could almost hear them holding their breath in the pauses. I think they liked the Liszt sonata best, *nicht* ? Or perhaps the Chopin waltzes. They always like the Chopin waltzes. I have not played in Chicago since 1920, and they have not forgotten me. One of the ladies who came up afterwards said—"

Charitakis contributed almost nothing to the conversation for the first half-hour, and the little he did say was scarcely heard by Krakovsky. But after half an hour of such chatter Krakovsky, sipping his second glass of beer in the comfortable hotel sitting-room, grew a little quieter.

" *Ach, Gott !* " he said, stretching his feet out on a *chaise longue.* " How I miss my own house and Amalie ! The next time I make a concert tour in America I shall bring Amalie with me. I am getting too old to travel alone . . . Tell me, Charitakis, did you really like the Chopin waltzes ? "

Charitakis assured him for the fortieth time that he had really liked the Chopin waltzes. Then, turning his glass of beer around against the light and looking at it attentively, he added :

" And that black-key *étude*—how beautifully it was played ! . . . I wonder . . . Master, did you ever know Biélostotzky ? "

Krakovsky, lighting a cigarette, frowned importantly as he reflected on this question.

" Biélostotzky ? " he repeated. " Biélostotzky ? Isn't he the little man who teaches piano in the Moscow Conservatory ? Yes, it seems to me I met him in Russia before the war—him or another with such a name."

Charitakis continued to look at his glass of beer.

" I wondered," said the Greek suavely, " if you had ever heard him play that black-key *étude.* He always finishes it up by making a glissando in double octaves between the final chords."

Krakovsky looked up sharply.

" Impossible ! " he said. " Nobody can do that."

Charitakis smiled with a profound satisfaction and drank his beer.

" I am afraid, dear Master," he said, " that you are wrong on that point. I have heard Biélostotzky do it—not once, but many times. I did some work with him before the war, and when I toured Russia again last year I went to see him. He is an old man now and does not teach much at the Conservatory, but he played the black-key *étude* for me and finished it with the same glissando in double octaves. It gives an electrifying effect."

Krakovsky got up and went over to the grand piano which the hotel management had installed in the room for him.

" I have never heard of such a thing," he mumbled, disturbed. " Let me just see if it is possible. I cannot believe it."

He opened the piano, sat down, stared at the keyboard for a moment, and began to play the Chopin *étude* in G flat, Opus 10, No. 5. He played it, of course, with an incredible brilliance and precision. Charitakis listened with closed eyes.

At the end of the piece Krakovsky hurled his fingers at the four B flats on the upper octaves of the piano and attempted to bring them down in unison, glissando, over the black keys. His fingers fell between the black keys, thumping accidentals without number. The noise was terrific in the little room.

" The devil ! " he said, jumping up and holding his fingers

anxiously. " It is impossible. It cannot be done. Nobody could play such a thing. The human hands are not made to play such a thing."

" It is of no importance, dear Master," said Charitakis. " It is a cheap trick, after all. Biélostotzky does it, but who is Biélostotzky ? Only an obscure piano teacher in Moscow. He is quite unworthy of your attention, Master."

Krakovsky began to walk up and down the room.

" I cannot understand it," he said. " I have never heard of anything I could not do—anything, that is, that anybody else could do. It is not possible. *Voyez-vous*, Charitakis, I am the greatest pianist of all time ; everybody admits that my technique is without parallel anywhere. How can it be possible for a miserable little Russian piano teacher to play something I cannot play ? Look at the distances between the black keys on the piano ! *Voyons, voyons*—let us be reasonable men, and do not ask the impossible ! "

" I am sorry, Master," said Charitakis. " It is a matter of no importance. I would not have you disturbed over it for anything in the world. But the fact is that it isn't impossible, since Biélostotzky does it."

Krakovsky sat down suddenly ; his round face puckered and he looked as if he were about to burst into tears.

" I can play a glissando in double octaves on the *white* keys," he said. " I can do it better than anybody now living, as you will admit, *nicht* ?. But I never heard of such a thing on the black keys. Leschetizky never did it, I know. Tausig never did it. I have just tried it and it cannot be done. You heard me try it, didn't you ? "

" I heard," said Charitakis with great gravity. " Unfortunately, dear Master, I cannot remain with you to discuss this interesting point. My wife expects me for dinner. But do not allow yourself to be disquieted ; Biélostotzky is an old man. He will be dead before long, and soon nobody will ever know that he could play such a glissando. Not many people are aware of it even now."

" That does not make much difference," said Krakovsky with unexpected nobility. " If nobody ever knew, it would be the same thing. *Voyez-vous*, Charitakis, it is a question which goes beyond that . . . But I cannot believe it. I believe what you say, because you say it ; but how can such a thing *be*, Charitakis ? How can it *be* ? "

He sat looking at his fingers for a long time after Charitakis left, moving them up and down on his knees, frowning at them. At last he went to the piano and played the black-key *étude* over and over again. Each time, at the end, he attempted to sweep his two hands across the keyboard in a glissando which would touch the

black keys alone. At the fifteenth attempt he was no more able to do it than he had been in the beginning. His fingers were sore, lacerated, with the blood so near the surface that its pulses could be felt when he touched the keys. Krakovsky's fingers had not bled for many years; but after about an hour of this he noticed a tiny smear on one of the keys. He rose from the piano and closed it softly. When he turned to go into the bedroom he walked like an old man.

The Chopin *étude* Opus 10, No. 5, has been the delight of a century of pianists and students; it became Krakovsky's torture. As originally written it ends with a brilliant cascade of double octaves down the keyboard, delivered fortissimo and staccato, followed by two smashing chords separated by a rest; the first chord is on the B flats of the upper part of the piano, the second on the G flats in the bass. All of the *études* in Opus 10 were published in the golden years of Chopin's friendship with Liszt, and the work was dedicated to the abbé; but neither then nor afterwards is it recorded that Liszt played the thing with a black-key glissando at the end.

Krakovsky now devoted every ounce of energy he possessed towards the enterprise of connecting those two final chords by a glissando. For hours every day he practised glissandos; tears and blood went into them, for his attempts were never successful, and his finger-tips often were worn until the skin was gone. He played increasingly badly for the rest of his American concert tour, often being obliged to substitute easier pieces for those scheduled on his programmes when his fingers were sore.

His final appearance, as soloist with one of the symphony orchestras in the Tchaikovsky concerto, had to be cancelled altogether, and he sailed for Buenos Aires in the spring with a considerably damaged reputation among the musical potentates of America.

On the way down to Buenos Aires he swore to forget the black-key *étude*, nurse his fingers back to health, and fulfil his engagements in Argentina and Brazil in his old-time triumphant fashion. For the whole length of the voyage he succeeded in keeping his resolution; his fingers were quite healed, and he felt almost cheerful again. He spent some time in reading musical memoirs he had bought in New York, in order to discover if any of the great pianists had played the G-flat *étude* with a glissando at the end; but aside from this relatively harmless inquiry, the obsession appeared to have left him.

Then, in Buenos Aires, a hopeful Argentine mother appeared at his hotel one day with an infant prodigy in tow; she wanted the Master to listen to the prodigy play. The Master was not busy,

and agreed to listen ; the child played the black-key *étude*. From the first note Krakovsky knew that it was no use fighting. The fever was upon him again. As soon as the infant prodigy had been removed the Master sat down at the piano and began to practise furious glissandos in double octaves. At the end of two hours his fingers were torn and sore; the side of his little finger smeared the keys with red.

" It is no use," he said to his horrified manager the next day, " I am ill ; I am out of my mind ; my fingers are sick and will not do what I tell them to do. I cannot possibly play my concerts here, and the whole tour will have to be cancelled. I am going home."

The manager attempted to hold Krakovsky to his contract ; but this is a thing which has never yet been possible in similar circumstances. There was a certain amount of unpleasantness in the newspapers ; the " nervous breakdown " alleged by Krakovsky was liberally interpreted to mean almost anything but that ; and the pianist sailed for Hamburg with still more of his professional prestige in ruins.

Rumours began to get about the world of music that summer and autumn ; it was said that Krakovsky had gone insane. Charitakis, who had spent the summer teaching in America, heard the reports and wondered. It became known that Krakovsky had abandoned all his engagements for the whole of that autumn and winter. It was said that he refused to take any pupils at any price ; that he saw nobody in Berlin, avoided his acquaintances sedulously, and neglected to deal with any of his correspondence.

Charitakis, arriving in Berlin for a concert the following January, made up his mind to pay a visit to the old virtuoso and find out what might be at the bottom of these eccentricities.

It was a long, cold drive in a taxi-cab out to the Olivärplatz in Charlottenburg, but Charitakis bundled himself up in a fur coat, put gloves over his beringed fingers, goloshes over his patent-leather shoes, and set out. Krakovsky's apartment was on the third floor of one of the ugliest houses in Charlottenburg ; Charitakis shuddered as he looked at it. The inside of the place was even worse. The door was opened by a plump, hostile old woman.

" Amalie ! " said Charitakis. " Don't you recognize me ? I've come to see the Master.

" *Ach, so*—Herr Charitakis," said Amalie without emotion. " It has been many years since I saw you last. Come in and get warm ; perhaps you would like a glass of port wine ? The Master is not at home. He has gone to his sister's house ; one of her children has a birthday today. You don't know the Master's sister ? She keeps a little Polish restaurant somewhere near the Kurfürsten-

damm. I don't know her either, thank God. I never could stand these Poles—except, that is, the Master. Excuse me; I believe Madame Charitakis is Polish?"

"No," said Charitakis, sitting down. "She's French."

"*Ja*—it's the same thing," said Amalie indifferently. "Poles and French and Jews—they're all alike. Well, I was born a German, thank God, and that is one thing they can't take away from me."

She stood four-square in front of him, her ugly, capable hands folded across her stomach.

"Why don't you sit down, Amalie?" Charitakis asked. "And why have you become so nationalistic all of a sudden? Has the Master been behaving particularly badly?"

"*Na, wass,*" said Amalie, sighing and taking her place on the very edge of a hideous sofa. "The Master is good when he is in his right mind; but you see, Herr Charitakis, he is a Pole, after all—both Polish and Jewish—and he cannot help it. The Poles are all mad; the Jews are all bad. Now the Master is both bad and insane. I do not know what is the matter with him. If he only would beat me I would not care; he has beaten me many times before, and what are a few blows, after all? But now he does not even beat me or throw things at me. He pays no attention to me at all. He turns down pupils; he turns down concerts; he will not see his friends; all he will do all day long is pound at the piano or sit still. I am glad he went to his sister's today; I am very nearly insane myself, from living with him."

She delivered these statements placidly, without a sign of emotion and without looking at Charitakis. Her eyes were bent respectfully on the floor; her hands were folded in her lap.

"I heard that he was behaving strangely," said Charitakis. "What do you think is the matter with him?"

"He is crazy, *mein Herr*," said Amalie simply. "A man is not a Pole for nothing. He always plays the same thing on the piano, too—a kind of noise, from the top to the bottom of the piano, very loud and blurred. *Schrecklich.*"

Charitakis got up and went over to the grand piano which stood in the corner, the only chaste and beautiful object in the crowded room.

"Is this the kind of noise he makes?" the Greek asked, playing a rough glissando over the black keys with one finger.

"That's it," said Amalie, "only louder, and with all the fingers instead of one. It sounds terrible."

Suddenly she looked up at him, a profound suspicion lurking in her pale blue eyes.

"How did you know?" she asked.

Charitakis closed the piano suddenly and returned to his chair.

The old woman made him feel embarrassed, almost guilty. He resolved to go away as soon as possible.

" How did you know ? " she repeated.

" It's a thing pianists very often—er—practise," said Charitakis. " I only wondered."

" Every day," she said, " he pounds and pounds and pounds. It is a terrible noise. Then he will stop pounding and go and sit in a chair, and will not speak for hours at a time. He will receive nobody except the accursed Bolsheviks."

" Bolsheviks ? " said Charitakis. " What in God's name— ? "

" They have been coming to see him every week," she went on. " At first it was because he had written to them to say that he wanted to go to Russia and play. Oh, I know what goes on ; I have ears. But now they come to see him because *they* want him to go to Russia, and he keeps saying, ' Not yet ; I am not ready yet.' I hope he never is ready, because I am sure they will murder him if he goes."

Charitakis got up and began to move irritably about the room.

" The man is insane," he said. " Who would have thought that he— ? It's madness, plain madness. It isn't my fault, is it ? Obviously you can see that it isn't my fault."

" I don't know," said Amalie.

" It isn't my fault," said Charitakis, still more nervously. His long white hands moved about, so that the diamonds and emeralds on them glittered in the grey light of the Berlin afternoon. Amalie sat quietly looking at the jewelled rings.

" I'm going now," said Charitakis. " I've got to go. Look here, Amalie, take care of the old man, will you ? Don't let him go to Russia. He is insane enough now ; he will be more insane if he goes to Russia. I am very sorry about all this, but I can't help it. If he hasn't been playing or teaching, perhaps you need money ? I have money ; I could give you anything you need."

" We have money," said Amalie with a certain dignity. " He makes no money at all now, but we still have enough. You are kind."

" No, I'm not kind," said Charitakis, " I am not kind at all. I am a fool. Good-bye, Amalie. If you ever need anything, let me know."

To the old woman's astonishment he took her square, hard hand and raised it quickly towards his lips.

" *Adieu*," he said, and went on his glittering way.

She stood, puzzled, beside the door and touched one of her hands —the one which had been kissed—with the first finger of the other. In her sixty-five years her hand had never before been kissed.

Krakovsky's visit to Russia was an event of some importance to others besides himself. It marked the virtuoso's emergence from a retirement which had lasted two full years, and it appeared to dispose of the rumours that he would never play in public again. Moreover, it was treated by the Soviet Minister of Fine Arts with the consideration it deserved, and the walls of Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev were plastered with posters bearing the name of the famous pianist who was returning to the scene of his earliest renown.

In view of the distinction of the visitor, and of his decidedly mature age, the first request he had to make to his mentors from the Society sponsoring his visit, was regarded as very odd.

" I wish to be taken to call on Professor Biélostotzky of the old Moscow Conservatorium," he said.

" But, Master," said the young men from the Society, " there are many of the musicians of Moscow who wish to call on you. There are interviews to be given to the Press. And you must be tired from your long journey."

" I am not tired," said Krakovsky. " Amalie will unpack my belongings. If one of you will go with me, so that I am not lost in this new Moscow, I wish to call on Professor Biélostotzky."

After a hasty committee meeting and a certain amount of official conversation over the telephone, the Society, with a show of reluctance, yielded the point; Krakovsky would be allowed to call, under escort, upon Professor Biélostotzky. Amalie was left, suspicious and defiant, to unpack the Master's baggage in their suite at the Hotel Moskovskaya.

Professor Biélostotzky lived in a dismal old house in Lavrushinsky, on the opposite bank of the river. It was a house like thousands of others in Moscow, with a large interior courtyard and as many inhabitants as an ant-heap. The Professor's room was at the top of four flights of stairs, and Krakovsky was panting when he came to the top of them. The Professor opened the door for them and stared sightlessly through very thick glasses.

" Citizen Krakovsky has come to call upon you," said the young man from the Society. " You should feel greatly honoured."

The Professor started, trembled, stared again through his heavy glasses. " I am greatly honoured," he mumbled. " I am very greatly honoured. Krakovsky! Krakovsky himself! Oh, Master, come in—come into my room; I am greatly honoured."

The room was small and bare. It contained a bed, not made; two kitchen chairs, some piles of music and books in corners, a porcelain stove, and a square piano. The visit appeared to have frightened the Professor almost out of his wits, for he kept on bowing and mumbling and peering through his immensely thick glasses. The young man from the Society sat down awkwardly on a kitchen

chair and lighted a cigarette. After two or three vain attempts at conversation, Krakovsky went over to the piano.

"I have heard of you as a very brilliant interpreter of Chopin, Professor," he said. "I should like to play some Chopin for you and receive your criticism."

The blind old Professor sighed, bowed again, and sat down to listen in reverence.

Krakovsky smiled exultantly to himself as he adjusted the piano stool. Grimacing a little at the idea of playing on such a piano, he struck a chord or two; it sounded better than he had expected. Still smiling confidently, he began the Polonaise in A flat.

The technique was still there. He did not pause long after the last smashing chord, and before it had died away he was embarked on the A-minor waltz. Only when this was finished did he draw a deep breath and set out—at long last, after two years of waiting—on the black-key *étude*.

He played it as it had, no doubt, never been played in all the years since Chopin first showed it to Liszt, in Paris, when the pianoforte was young. It flashed and sang through the room; the two crescendos were overwhelming, the diminuendo a little miracle of subtlety and grace. At the end the passage in double octaves thundered down the keyboard, followed by a crashing upper chord; and then, as the blind old Professor held his breath in ecstasy, the virtuoso brought his two hands down across the piano with a perfect glissando in double octaves.

The room was suddenly silent; only the blind Professor could be faintly heard to weep. Krakovsky turned around from the piano at last and smiled. "You like it?" he asked.

"Ah, Master!" said the old Professor, "I have never heard anything like it. If I had not heard it myself I would have sworn that no human hands could ever have played that last glissando."

He seized Krakovsky's two hands and held them while the tears fell from behind his thick glasses.

Krakovsky had grown cold all over. He was not smiling now.

"What do you mean? Is that not the way you play it?"

"I?" the Professor echoed. "I could never have played that glissando even when I was young. Oh, Master! No other pianist could do it, I am sure—neither I nor any other. It is impossible—it is a miracle—and you have done it."

* * *

The pitcher that goes too often to the well leaves behind either the handle or the spout.

CERVANTES, *Don Quixote*

LANDSCAPE WITH FIGURES

Madam, will you walk, Madam, will you talk,
Madam, will you walk and talk with me?

The Gentlemen walked with the Ladies into a goodly Garden, making Chaplets and Nosegays of divers flowers, and singing silently to themselves . . . GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO, *Decameron*, *Translator Unknown*, 1620

Dryad

The dark green woods
Are lit by a sun
High in the heavens
Where white clouds run.

But never shone brighter
Each woodland tree
Than when my young love
Gave her love to me.

PÁDRAIG O'HORAN

Hilltop

It was a perfect morning, the sun shone brightly, lighting up all the scenery around; the birds were singing in the beach trees close by and the rippling of the little stream was as sweet music to the ear.

"Do you know Helen, I had an engagement in London today, but I put it off to come out with you" said Cyril, as they commenced to climb the hill.

"Oh indeed!" replied Helen "that was very kind of you."

"Oh no" answered Cyril "I would far rather be out here than in London."

"I quite agree with you there" said Helen "it would be horrid to be in smoky London today."

"Yes" said Cyril "especially without you."

"Oh rubbish" laughed Helen and she stopped down to pick a buttercup.

"Indeed it is not rubbish" replied Cyril "when a man loves, he finds it hard to be away from the object of his love."

"Oh does he?" said Helen "but then I am not the object of your love."

"Yes you are Helen," said Cyril, making an attempt to squeaze her hand.

" My dear boy " said Helen, " I do wish you would not talk such nonsense."

" Excuse me " answered Cyril, getting rather red " I am a man."

" Are you really ? " said Helen carelessly.

" Now look here Helen, don't be aggrivating " said the lover " you know quite well I love you and why I have come here."

They had reached the castle now and sat down by the ruined walls.

" Why have I come up here ? " asked Cyril again.

" I suppose because it is more breezy than the town " replied Helen.

" Don't be silly Helen " said Cyril pulling up a tuft of grass.

" I am not the least silly " said Helen smiling beneath her handkerchief.

" No of course you're not darling " cried Cyril putting his arm round her waist.

" You must'nt call me ' darling ' Cyril " replied the girl shyly.

" Yes I must " said Cyril getting a little closer.

" Oh well for once in a way perhaps it does'nt matter " said Helen.

DAISY ASHFORD, *The Hangman's Daughter*

Country Dance

She come by the down, wi' trippen walk,
By deäsies, an' sheenèn banks o' chalk,
An' brooks, where the crowvoot flow'rs did strew
The sky-tinted water, white on blue.

She nodded her head as playÿ'd the band ;
She dapp'd wi' her voot as she did stand ;
She danced in a reel, a-weärèn new
A skirt wi' a jacket, white wi' blue.

I singled her out vrom thin an' stout,
Vrom slender an' stout I chose her out ;
An' what, in evenèn, could I do,
But gi'e her my breast-knot, white an' blue ?

WILLIAM BARNES, 1801-1886

Tableau

Groups of amorous beauties were disposed on the margins of chrystal streams, in shady bowers, under marble porticoes of wondrous beauty, in all the variety of Love's calendar when loosened from civilized decorum . . .

From *Arnold's Magazine of the Fine Arts*, 1834

Out of Town

Love in cities never dwells,
He delights in rural cells
Which sweet woodbine covers.
What are your assemblies then?
There, 'tis true, we see more men;
But much fewer lovers.

JOHN GAY, 1685-1732

Come into the Garden

We first began to walk, on the longest of these terraces, which was planted with a thick avenue of trees. We had recovered from the note of badinage on which we had begun, and as we walked she became a trifle confidential: so did I, and our confidences became gradually more intimate and more interesting.

We had now been in the garden for some time: she had begun by giving me her arm, but we soon drew closer and she was leaning so heavily on mine that without its support she would almost have fallen. The attitude was agreeable, but began to grow fatiguing, and we had still a great deal to say to each other. We observed a grassy bank, and sat down upon it without changing our attitude. It was while sitting thus that we began to speak in praise of all the charms and joys of mutual confidence . . .

CLAUDE-JOSEPH DORAT, 1734–1780, *Never Again!*
translated by ERIC SUTTON

Near or Far

Do not think that I so soon forget you
As I go home;
The thousand golden cornfields from the train,
The clouds like foam,
The sleepy stations, the white-daisied fields;
The birds, the trees,
All fold you closer to my heart
Since it is these
That we two love, together or apart;
Think not how far
The rushing train now carries me away,
But how we are
Together in the vastness of our love,
Are linked together by the same bright star.

DOUGLAS GIBSON, *Winter Journey*

CLEVER DOG

Something very queer was happening

by DAL STIVENS

BY rights the wind ought to have been using my whitened ribs as a xylophone weeks ago, and the crows ought to have been as fat as ticks from feeding on my unattended mob of sheep, with me tossed in as a before-dinner titbit.

I was in the back of the outback, two hundred miles from anywhere, with a broken leg, but instead of having to risk a knock on the Pearly Gates, everything was dodger. My leg was healing as well as it would in one of those posh city hospitals, my mob was thriving and growing pound notes right under my eyes, and the crows were too scared of Peggy, my kelpie sheepdog, to poke their noses out of the gorge where she'd chased them.

To make things even more snitcher I was living on the fat of the land and in a few minutes I'd sit down to a plate of roast wild duck that would have set me back ten bob at one of those flash Sydney restaurants.

About an hour ago a mob of black ducks had come soaring past and settled on the billabong.

"By gosh, I'd like to sink my molars into one of those," I said aloud to myself.

I'd hardly finished talking before Peggy, my kelpie bitch, was tugging the Cashmore out of the back of the sulky. She lugged it over to where I lay in my camp stretcher and then went off to fetch me some cartridges. I couldn't see the point of it, though, because the billabong was a good quarter of a mile away, and there's no shot-gun made that will carry that far.

I should have trusted the kelpie. All kelpies are beautiful with sheep and as intelligent as you like. But none I ever struck was in the same paddock as Peggy. She pelted off towards that billabong and scared the blackies into the air.

I expected them to head away but Peggy knew what she was doing. There was a mirage just by my camp and, just as Peggy had worked it out, they took it for water and settled on the ground. I let them have both barrels and bagged seventeen.

If Peggy had had fingers she'd have plucked and cleaned them

there and then, but she did almost everything else, while I fixed the ducks up. She dragged fresh wood on to the fire, brought the pan to me, and fetched the fat tin.

I'd done my leg in six weeks ago. I went head over turkey out of the sulky when the right wheel hit a log I hadn't seen.

"Well," I told myself then, "you'll do a perish, mate, and no mistake. You're two hundred miles as the crow flies from anywhere."

Talking of crows, there were millions of 'em, and as soon as they saw me lying on the ground, they came and perched in the trees right over my head, cawing loudly, and sharpening their beaks on the branches, and telling themselves that supper wouldn't be long. But, as it turned out, they reckoned without Peggy.

I lay on the ground and thought it over. It was queer country where I was and I could believe that no one else had ever been here, except perhaps an odd swaggie like the bloke who had told me about this valley.

Six months earlier the big drought had made me take to the roads with my mob of a thousand sheep. Others were in the long paddock like myself and there weren't many pickings for my mob, which were losing condition fast. Then the swaggie I'd helped out with some tobacco put me on to this spot.

It was only five days' going from where I was, but it turned out to be tough. I lost a couple of hundred ewes, and two of the three dogs got sick and turned up their toes, leaving me only Peggy. The last three days I had to head across country too hungry to support a cockroach. I wondered why the hell I had ever listened to that sundowner.

But when we got through the valley mouth everything was dodger. The grass was thick, up to the sulky's floor in places, and there was plenty of water. Here was rich ten-pound-an-acre country in the middle of a stretch you wouldn't give tenpence an acre for—and I had it to myself. And then I had to do my leg in.

So many crows had perched in the big gums around me that their limbs began to droop like weeping willows.

"Well, I suppose I'd better try some splints," I said aloud to myself.

The next thing Peggy is beating it off into the bush, and although I yelled and whistled to her to come back, she took no notice. It wasn't like her, and I put it down to the queer something-or-other I felt about this stretch of country. It wasn't natural, for one thing, for there to be so many crows.

When I thought Peggy had cleared out, I felt pretty low, I can tell you. But in less time than it takes to tell you this, Peggy is back with two bits of bark she has gnawed off which are just the right

length for splints. Before I'd quite cottoned on to what I had to do with them, Peggy has raced off again and is scrounging round the back of the sulky for an old shirt I had stowed there, for me to tear into bandages.

While I'm doing that, Peggy cuts loose on the crows. I've heard blokes claim the kelpies they owned were so smart they could work flies into the neck of a beer bottle, but they had nothing on Peggy. Almost before I've fixed the splints Peggy has worked those kellies into a single mob and taken the black death-birds a mile up the valley, where she yards them into a gorge and leaves them there, cawing madly but not game to move out.

Peggy comes pelting back just as I'm saying, " I'd have a chance now if I could get the tent fixed up. That and a good meal would help."

The words are hardly out before Peggy is tearing around looking for poles for the tent. She had some trouble biting through the young saplings, but in the end we had enough, and we got the tent rigged between us, though Peggy had hardly enough weight for laying back on the ropes.

When the tent was up and I'd crawled into the camp stretcher, I started thinking how hungry I was and was just about to tell Peggy to fetch me the hunk of corn-beef, but she had other ideas. She reckoned I needed some fresh meat now that I was an invalid and scooted away into the bush.

In about ten minutes she came back with a three-quarters-grown buck, which I skinned and cut up. I'd barely finished the job before she was waving a bit of bark under my nose and making signs for me to put a match to it, and in no time she has built a good roasting fire.

I lived for about a month on rabbits and wild pigeons, which Peggy used to stalk and catch, and then I felt like a change of diet, particularly when I saw that mob of black ducks. Well, as I told you, Peggy worked the mirage lurk on them and did those blackies taste good !

Just about this time, I noticed something queer was happening to the sheep. I thought I was going nuts at first. The sheep were growing green wool. And Blossom was growing a green mane. When I got over my shock, I worked out it must be something to do with the grass and it being spring, because Peggy still kept her usual red colour. So each day for a week I nibbled a handful of the grass, and, sure enough, my own hair and beard began to turn green.

It grew so quick, too, that it was down to my knees in a couple of days. I knocked off eating the grass then, of course, because

green wasn't a colour I'd choose myself for my hair or beard. As soon as I stopped eating the grass my hair went back to its usual brown.

The trouble with Blossom was the green hair grew so fast that she stumbled over her mane, and she could scarcely see. I had to clip her every three days, and at first it was something to keep me occupied, but after a while I got fed up, particularly when I had to do it every second day.

I was worried now about the sheep, because their green wool was soon about ten feet long, and they couldn't move without treading on each other's fleeces and tripping each other up. They were blind as bats, too, and couldn't find their way to drink at the billabong without Peggy helping them there.

To make things worse Peggy was just about to drop her pups, and this slowed her up in her work. Three of them arrived one night, and before their eyes were open Peggy started training them to work the sheep. The pups made a bit of difference when they grew up a little, but I could see the job was getting too big. The fleeces were now twenty feet long, and I had to clip Blossom every day. The sheep were falling over every few minutes.

" I wish there was some way of shearing the sheep," I said to myself.

Before I can blink, Peggy is heading for the billabong and barking for the three pups, all bitches, to follow her. All four kelpies dive into the water, and I heard a great deal of barking and splashing going on.

In about five minutes I noticed a great black-and-grey mass crawling over the ground. It's like a wave, about four feet high, and when it gets near, I see that Peggy and her pups have hunted millions and millions of crayfish out of the billabong.

Before I can tumble to what it is all about, the yabbies are crawling all over the sheep and nipping off the fleeces. Soon there were fleeces all over the place.

" You're a smart girl, Peggy," I told her, " but the fleeces ought to be gathered up."

Peggy just barked at me as though to let me know there was nothing to worry about, because she'd worked out a way of fixing that, too. And she had, by golly ! I hadn't noticed before, but the fleeces were getting stacked together. Peggy had her pups yarding up the meat ants to do the job.

My eyes were sticking out like organ stops by the time the ants had finished because they heaped all that lovely green wool into a stack as high as a six-storey building.

It got into summer, and the sheep started growing yellow wool. Almost all the ewes had lambed in the spring and the lambs grew

yellow wool, too, just as fast as their mothers. It was pretty hot, so Peggy sooled the crays on to the shearing every ten or twelve days.

By the end of summer, I had a great stack of yellow wool, a little bigger, if anything, than that of the green wool. It was as good as growing five-pound notes.

I kept tag of the days on a calendar a storekeeper had given me, and one day when I was crossing off a day, Peggy took a peek over my shoulder and suddenly got so excited, barking and jumping up, that I had to chase her away.

What had got her worked up was the coloured picture of a Highlander in the Campbell of Breadalbane tartan on the calendar, and I put it down to having got a kick in the ribs from a bloke in a kilt at a Highland gathering on New Year's Day—or perhaps it was Peggy's Scottish blood coming out. Kelpies have a bit of smooth-haired collie as well as dingo and black-and-tan collie in them, as you know, and are the most wonderfully intelligent sheepdogs in the world.

When we started running into autumn, I wondered what colour of wool the sheep would grow next. Don't ask me why, but it turned out to be blue, and by and by I had a large heap of blue wool.

I kept ticking the days off the calendar, and as winter came along, the sheep began to grow black wool. About this time Peggy and her pups ran into a spot of trouble with the crays. Most days now they took a bit of driving to their work and would try to sneak off into the bush. I can't say I blamed them, because their claws were getting worn down with all the nipping they had to do.

"We won't be able to work the poor yabbies much longer," I said. "We'll never be able to shear this black wool."

Peggy just barked as though to say she thought I was a damn fool. It struck me then she had been cheeky on a number of occasions lately. But I let it pass.

Peggy tore up the valley. I wasn't left long wondering what she and the pups were up to. In a few minutes there's such a cawing and croaking that it made my ears shake. Then about three million crows burst overhead in formation and went to work pecking the wool out of the sheep.

If anything, they were quicker than the yabbies, and I wondered then why Peggy hadn't used the kellies before. But she was right, as usual. Each time they pecked the wool out during the next few weeks they pinched some of it for their nests, and the black heap, as it turned out, wasn't as tall as I had expected. All the same, it was a fair stack and I had no complaints.

"There's a fortune for me with all this wool," I said, looking at the four heaps. "It's a pity it couldn't be woven on the spot.

It's already dyed but needs scouring, of course."

Hardly had I said this before Peggy and her three pups are beating it off into the bush. They are gone about an hour, and I'm wondering what they can be up to, when I see a couple of hundred whirlwinds twisting and turning up the mouth of the valley. I can hardly believe what I'm seeing, but Peggy and her pups are working those willy-willies and driving them where they want them.

In the next few minutes so much happens that I wonder if my eyes are letting me down. First the whirlwinds are worked into the big heaps of coloured wool, and the wool is caught up and goes swirling and twisting into the air. With a roar like a thousand express trains crossing a thousand overhead bridges together, the wool is whisked through the billabong and comes out scoured.

With a roar like a billion stock whips all cracking together, it is whirled up into the sky and spun into yarn. First, the heap of green wool, and then the others, in turn, are twirled so high and so fast your eyes can hardly follow. I've never seen any kelpies work more beautifully than Peggy and her pups did with those willy-willies.

Those willy-willies went leaping and bouncing across the sky so fast I got dizzy and gave up trying to work out what they were up to and sat back in my stretcher for a rest.

They were halfway through their work before I woke up to what was happening to the wool. I was so surprised I fell out of the stretcher and got a lump on the back of my head.

Those willy-willies had woven all that coloured wool into a huge piece of Campbell of Breadalbane tartan—green ground with black and blue half-inch crossings and a double yellow overcheck—four miles wide and already about seven miles long, stretching up into the sky, and only half finished.

I thought it was just a fluke at first and then I remembered how excited Peggy had been that day when she peeked over my shoulder and saw the Highlander on the calendar.

With all that tartan material I was a made man, though, it is true, I had a bit of trouble getting it out before I finished. Peggy had to rope the yabbies in to cut that great piece of Campbell tartan into lengths and they nearly jibbed on it.

I had to get three hundred and twenty-seven bullock teams to cart the lengths to the city. Peggy had some idea of making the crows do the job, but a bloke would have looked a bit silly following a lot of kellies along George Street, Sydney.

* * *

When our vices leave us, we give ourselves the credit of having left them.

LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

Famous Novels in Outline

UNDER TWO FLAGS

Adventure and Romance with the Foreign Legion

by OUIDA

Ouida—the name comes from her own childhood pronunciation of her second name, Louisa—the daring and copious author of nearly fifty novels, many of which scandalized her own generation, still provides unending delight and amusement in her stories. With one of the most famous (first published 1867*), a resounding adventure that ranges from London's choicest circles to the blazing desert of North Africa, Argosy brings to a close its suggestions for holiday reading.*

★

THE Honourable Bertie Cecil, of the First Life Guards, although a member of the fashionable London set and an admirable fellow in every other respect, is uncommonly hard put to it for money. No money-lender in London will accept his note after he has mortgaged his whole inheritance. In these circumstances his fortune depends on winning a race with his six-year-old, Forest King, and he has staked everything on the race. Nevertheless, with good-humoured generosity he lends his younger brother, Berkeley, fifty pounds.

The following day he rides Forest King to victory over a difficult course and receives the praise of his lady, a fashionable peeress wearing his colours of scarlet and white.

His father, Lord Royallieu, who lives in the same mortgaged splendour that he has taught his sons to enjoy, loves his sons with the exception of Bertie, who looks too much like his dead wife's lover and, to the old viscount's displeasure, carries the dead lover's name. The old man seizes every opportunity of sneering at Bertie's extravagance, and one day reveals his suspicions that Bertie is really the son of Alan Bertie.

Bertie is the darling of society. Sought after by half the women in London, he carries on flirtations with many. Lady Guenevere is one of his conquests.

His valet, Rake, whom Bertie had saved from an awkward affair and has treated as he treats others, with friendly decency, is devoted to him.

Meanwhile, his head groom has taken a bribe to dope Forest King. When it is learnt that Forest King has been doped before a race, his friends, far from blaming him, pretend that the horse was sick, but Bertie feels himself disgraced.

While Bertie's best friend, the Marquis of Rockingham, known to his comrades of the Guards as the Seraph, is attempting to discover the mystery of Forest King's condition, he receives a report that Bertie Cecil has forged his own name on a note.

Bertie cannot deny the charge, for the note was presented at a time when he was dining with Lady Guenevere. Wishing to protect her name from scandal, Bertie allows himself to be accused. Knowing that his brother has forged the note and hoping to protect Berkeley's name as well, he leaves London suddenly in order to escape arrest.

Bertie, accompanied by Rake, makes his escape on Forest King. Rake has discovered that the groom doped Forest King, and he has pummelled him for it. He and his master ride to a place of safety; then Bertie orders Rake to take Forest King to Lord Rockingham.

He waits in hiding for a time, in the hope that Lady Guenevere will save him by telling of his whereabouts when the forged note is presented. She chooses to keep silent, however, holding her reputation at greater worth than Bertie's name.

At last, by a throw of the dice, Bertie decides to cast his lot with the French Foreign Legion. The faithful Rake accompanies him. At home in England people believe Bertie dead as well as ruined. Rockingham has Forest King; the old viscount burns Bertie's picture.

As Louis Victor, Bertie makes his mark with his new companions in the Foreign Legion. They marvel at his skill with the horses, at his bravery, at his brilliance at dancing or cards.

Bertie is an experienced *Légionnaire* when he receives, six months late, the news that his father has died at the age of ninety. His older brother inherits the title.

Cigarette, a dancer and singer for the troops, comes to understand and like Bertie. She warns him against Colonel Châteauroy (who hates Bertie because of his gallant record and popularity), and asks him never to disobey any of the Colonel's commands, however unreasonable they may be. Partly out of pity for her, Bertie promises.

Shortly afterwards Cigarette saves Bertie's life from some drunken Arabs. She is in love with him, but he is indifferent to her.

Bertie spends his spare time carving chessmen of ivory, and through this occupation he meets the lovely Princess Corona d'Amagüe, a woman who has been unhappily married to a man injured while saving her brother's life. Her husband dying soon

after, the princess has felt ever since a feeling of responsibility for his death. Bertie soon falls in love with Princess Corona.

Colonel Châteauroy makes it clear that he will never allow Bertie to be promoted above the rank of corporal. Bertie learns that Rake has purposely been getting himself into trouble to prevent his own promotion, for he does not wish to outrank his master.

One day, in an out-of-date English newspaper, Bertie reads that his older brother has died suddenly and that Berkeley has become Viscount Royallieu.

The regiment is ordered out. In the fighting that follows, Cigarette saves the day when she arrives at the head of a fresh squadron of cavalry. She finds Bertie, badly wounded, on the battlefield.

In the tent where she has him carried, Bertie begins to talk incoherently while Cigarette sits beside him. All she hears him say makes her more jealous of the princess.

She also learns that Bertie is English. No French person ever hated the English more than she. At her request Bertie is not told who brought him back from the battlefield and cared for him during his sick ravings.

Three weeks later Bertie is startled when the Seraph comes as an English tourist to visit the Legion camp. Not wishing to encounter his former friend, Bertie asks for and receives permission to carry dispatches through hostile territory to another legion post.

With the faithful Rake, he rides away on a mission that means almost certain death. Rake is killed in an Arab ambush, but Bertie delivers his dispatches safely.

On his return trip he stops at a wayside station and there sees his brother Berkeley, who is one of a party of tourists travelling with Princess Córona. Bertie gives no sign of recognition but spurs his horse and rides on.

Berkeley follows Bertie. When he catches up with his older brother, he reveals his fear that Bertie may claim the title. Indifferent to all except Berkeley's selfishness, Bertie asks his brother to leave Algeria at once.

Shortly afterwards he discovers that Princess Corona is really the younger sister of the Seraph. She also has learned Bertie's real name, and insists that he make himself known to her brother. She begs him to claim his title, but he refuses.

Cigarette goes to Princess Corona, who asks her to tell Bertie that the Seraph is looking for his former friend. In another interview with Bertie, the princess pleads with him to tell his story and let the world be the judge.

As he leaves her tent Colonel Châteauroy intercepts him and

insults the princess. In sudden rage Bertie strikes his superior officer. Colonel Châteauroy arrests him. Bertie is sentenced to death.

When Cigarette hears Bertie's fate, she forces Berkeley, whom she meets accidentally, to acknowledge that Bertie is his brother, the true heir to the estate of Royallieu, who has gone into exile for Berkeley's crime.

She carries her story to a marshal of France, demanding that Bertie's honour be saved even though his life may already be forfeited. With a stay of execution signed by the marshal she rides at full speed to reach the camp before the hour set for Bertie's execution.

The Seraph, not Cigarette, reaches Bertie first, but in spite of his entreaties, Colonel Châteauroy refuses to delay the time of execution.

Cigarette reaches the spot just as the volley is fired. With her own body she takes the bullets intended for Bertie. She dies, the marshal's order safely delivered.

A child of the army and a soldier of France, she gives her life to save a comrade. It is a sacrifice that Bertie and Princess Corona, happily re-united, will never forget.

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POLYNESIAN MAGIC

Over the shining sand they rushed, plunging in ranks into the quiet blue beyond

by F. T. BULLEN

FAR away to the horizon on three sides of us stretched the sea, its wavelets all sparkling in the sun-glade, and dancing under the touch of the sedate trade-wind. Above hung a pale blue dome quivering with heat and light from the sun, that, halfway up his road to the zenith, seemed to be in the act of breaking his globular limit and flooding space with flame. Ah, it was indeed pleasant to lie on that little patch of pure sand, firm and smooth as a boarded floor, with the rocks fringed by greenery of many kinds overshadowing us, and the ocean murmuring at our feet.

The place was a little promontory on the eastern shore of Hapai, in the Friendly Islands, and my companion, who lay on the sand near me, was by birth a chief, a splendid figure of a man, with a grave, intellectual face, and deep, solemn voice that refused to allow the mangled English in which he spoke to seem laughable. He was my " flem " or friend, who, of his own initiative, kept me supplied with all such luxuries as the village afforded, and so great was my admiration for him as a man that it was with no ordinary delight I succeeded in persuading him to accompany me on a holiday ramble.

He had led me through forest paths beset by a thousand wonders of beauty in vegetation and insect life, showing me as we went how the untilled ground produced on every hand abundance of delicious food for man, over hills whence glimpses of land and sea incessantly flashed upon the sight till my eyes grew weary of enjoying, over skirting reefs just creaming with the indolent wash of the sea, every square yard of which held matter for a life's study, but all beautiful beyond superlatives. And at last, weary with wondering no less than with the journey, we had reached this sheltered nook and lain down to rest, lulled into dreamy peace by the murmurs of the Pacific rippling beneath us.

For some time we lay silent in great content. Every thought, every feeling, as far as I was concerned, was merged in complete satisfaction of all the senses. At times I glanced at my grave companion, wondering dreamily if he, too, though accustomed to these

delights all his life long, could feel that deep enjoyment of them that I, a wanderer from the bleak and unsettled North, was saturated with. But while this and kindred ideas lazily ebbed and flowed through my satisfied brain, the bright expanse of sea immediately beneath us suddenly started into life.

A school of porpoises, numbering several hundreds, broke the surface, new-risen from unknown depths, and began their merry gambols as if the superabundant life animating them must find a vent. They formed into three divisions, marched in undulating yet evenly spaced lines, amalgamated, separated, re-formed.

At one moment all clustered in one central mass, making the placid sea boil; the next, as if by a pivotal explosion, they were rushing at headlong speed in radiating lines towards a circumference. As if at a preconcerted signal, they reached it and disappeared.

Perfect quiet ensued for perhaps two minutes. Then, in solemn measure, solitary individuals, scattered over a vast area, rose into the air ten, fifteen, twenty feet, turned and fell, but, at our distance from them, in perfect silence. This pretty play continued for some time, the leaps growing gradually less vigorous until they ceased altogether, and we saw the whole company massing themselves in close order far out to sea.

A few minutes, for breathing space, I suppose, and then in one magnificent charge, every individual leaping twenty feet at each bound, they came thundering shoreward. It was an inspiring sight; that host of lithe black bodies in maddest rush along the sea-surface, lashing it into dazzling foam, and sending across to our ears a deep melodious roar like the voice of many waters.

Within a hundred yards of the shore they disappeared abruptly, as if an invisible line had there been drawn, and presently we saw them leisurely departing eastward, as though, playtime over, they had now resumed the normal flow of everyday duties.

While I lay quietly wondering over the amazing display I had just witnessed, I was almost startled to hear my companion speak, for he seldom did so unless spoken to first. (I translate.) "The great game of the sea-pigs that we have just seen brings back to my memory an old story which is still told among our people, but one which we are trying hard to forget with all the others, because they are of the evil days, and stir up in our children those feelings that we have fought so long to bury beyond resurrection. This story, however, is harmless enough, although I should neither tell it to, nor listen to it from, one of my own people.

"Long ago when we worshipped the old cruel gods, and my ancestors were chief priests of that worship, holding all the people under their rule in utter terror and subjection, our chief, yes, our

only, business besides religion was war. Our women were slaves who were only born for our service, and it is not easy now to understand what our feelings then were towards the sex to whom we are now so tender. Our only talk was of the service of the gods and of war, which indeed was generally undertaken for some religious reason, more often than not to provide human victims for sacrifice.

" In one of these constantly recurring wars the men of Tonga-tabu—of course, each group of these islands was then independent of the others—made a grand raid upon Hapai. They were helped by some strangers, who had been washed ashore from some other islands to the northward, to build bigger and better war-canoes than had ever before been seen, for our people were never famous for canoe-building.

" They kept their plans so secret that, when at daybreak one morning the news ran round Hapai that a whole fleet of war-canoes was nearing the shore, our people were like a school of flying-fish into the midst of which some dolphin has suddenly burst.

" One of my ancestors, called ' The Bone-Breaker ' from his great strength and courage, met the invaders with a mere handful of his followers and delayed their landing for hours until he and all his warriors were killed.

" By this time fresh bands were continually arriving, so that the warriors from Tonga must needs fight every inch of their way through the islands. And as they destroyed band after band their war-hunger became greater, their rage rose, and they determined to leave none of us living except such as they kept for sacrifice on their altars at home. Day after day the slaughter went on, ever more feeble grew the defence, until warriors who had never refused the battle hid themselves like the *pêca* in holes of the rocks.

" Behind us, about two miles inland, there is a high hill with a flat top and steep sides. To this as a shelter fled all the unmarried girls of our people, fearing to be carried away as slaves to Tonga, but never dreaming of being slain if their hiding-place was found.

" Here they remained unseen for seven days, until, ravenous with hunger, they were forced to leave their hiding-place and come down. But they hoped that, although no tidings had reached them from outside, their enemies had departed.

" Four hundred of them reached the plain over which we passed just now, weak with fasting, with no man to lead them, trembling at every rustling branch in the forest around. All appeared as it does today, the islands seemed slumbering in serene peace, although they knew that every spot where their people had lived was now defiled by the recent dead.

" While they paused, huddling together irresolutely, there suddenly burst upon their ears a tempest of exultant yells, and from

both sides of the hill they had lately left the whole force of Tongans rushed after them. They fled as flies the booby before the frigate-bird, and with as little hope of escape. Before them spread this same bright sea smiling up at them as if in welcome.

" You know how our people love the sea, how we love to cradle ourselves on its waves from the day when, newly born, our mothers lay us in its refreshing waters, until even its life-giving touch can no longer reanimate our withered bodies. So who can wonder that the maidens fled to it for refuge ? Over this shining sand they rushed, plunging in ranks from yonder reef-edge into the quiet blue beyond.

" Hard behind them came the hunters, sure of their prey. They reached the reef and stared with utter dread and amazement upon the pretty play of a great school of porpoises in just such graceful evolutions as we have now seen.

" Terror seized upon those blood-lusting Tongans, their muscles shrank and their weapons fell. Had there been one hundred Hapaian warriors left alive they might have destroyed the whole Tongan host, for it was become as a band of lost and terrified children dreading at every step to meet the vengeance of the gods. But there was none to hinder them, so they fled in safety to their own shores, never to invade Hapai again.

" And when, after many years, the few survivors of that week of death had re-peopled Hapai, the story of the four hundred maidens befriended by the sea-gods in their time of need was the most frequently told among us.

" And to this day is the porpoise ' taboo ', although we know now that this legend, as well as all the others which have been so carefully preserved among us, is only the imagination of our fórefathers' hearts. Yet I often wish that we knew some of them were true."

* * *

ANSWERS to EXCELSIOR! on page 22

1. *Edmond Dantès in " The Count of Monte-Cristo," by Alexandre Dumas.*
2. *Punch, in the puppet-drama of Punch and Judy, author unknown.*
3. *The wandering singer in " The Song of Wandering Aengus," by W. B. Yeats.*
4. *Dr. Faustus in " The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus," by Christopher Marlowe.*
5. *George and Lennie in " Of Mice and Men," by John Steinbeck.*
6. *Captain Absolute in " The Rivals," by R. B. Sheridan.*
7. *The poet in the poem, " In the Highlands," by R. L. Stevenson.*
8. *The Red Cross Knight, in "The Faerie Queene," by Edmund Spenser.*

NEW MEMBER

Even in the dimly lit room he felt the curiosity in their eyes

by GEOFFREY KINO

HE stood outside the building. He was like someone in a dream, like a puppet guided by indecisive hands. He felt tired and his back ached. He had never experienced pain before and now that it had come to him, he found himself to be a bad sufferer. He felt like a person who has had a long and serious illness, a raging fever that leaves the patient weak and empty of emotion.

He looked up at the house. It towered above him, imposing in a grim, unfriendly way. He wondered with a weird incuriosity how he had got there and why he had come. Long before his feet guided him up the steps leading to the front door, he knew he was going inside; he knew he had no option.

As he went up the steps he ran his fingers through his close-cropped hair with distaste. The doors opened to his touch and he found himself standing before a reception desk.

The uniformed attendant looked up. "Good evening, sir."

As he searched his mind for something to say, something to explain his presence, the attendant rose and came round to the front of the desk. "Mr. John, isn't it, sir? You are expected. The committee and Dr. Hawley are waiting."

"Just a moment, my name is . . ." He began to find some authority in his voice at last. Here was something definitely wrong.

"If you will permit me, sir, the rule of this club is that Christian names only are used. Dr. Hawley will explain the reason, sir. Will you follow me, please?"

For a moment he wanted to protest, but he had neither the will nor the energy.

He followed the attendant across the large and comfortable hall. His feet sank into the thick pile of the carpet. He began to feel acutely ashamed of his appearance. His heavy boots were wet and unpolished and he knew without looking that he was leaving a slight trail of mud behind him.

The attendant had stopped before a door, and, after knocking discreetly, was opening it and announcing him to the unknown hosts.

He saw a long polished table, at either side of which sat three people. A small man had risen from the head of this table and was coming forward to meet him. Everyone was looking at him and, despite the faint illumination of the room, he could see, or rather, he could feel, the frank curiosity in their eyes.

"Good evening, Mr. John. Welcome to our Society. I hope that you will be joining us. My name is Hawley." He held out a hand and John found the grip cold, dry, and limp. He disliked this kind of handshake, and the man's appearance was hardly prepossessing. He tried to find some expression of welcome in the face but could not penetrate the thick lenses that hid the eyes.

He heard himself saying, "Good evening, sir." That was it, everything he had done since he had found himself outside this place was like an act, as though he were watching himself in a mirror. Again his voice came to him, as if from a long way off. "I must confess that I am a little bewildered to find myself here. I feel there must be some mistake." He made a small apologetic sweep with his left hand.

"Quite so," the other interrupted in his precise emotionless voice. "If you will please be seated." He waved his hand towards an empty chair at the foot of the table. John moved towards it mechanically.

"I shall now explain your presence here, or I should say you will explain it to us." He gave an appreciative little chuckle which was echoed by the others at the table.

John found himself sitting between a man and a woman. Both their faces were vaguely familiar. He wished they would turn on some more lights; recently he seemed to have become used to bright light.

"Mr. John—" Dr. Hawley had seated himself at the head of the table—"before I call this extraordinary meeting of our Committee to order, I should like to introduce you to your two sponsors. You are seated between them. On your left is Mrs. Edith and on your right is Mr. Frederick. They have been—er, shall we say?—associated for some time. Now, Mr. John, I am going to put a few questions to you in order to refresh your memory and then we shall let you tell your story in your own way. You will tell us the truth; in fact, it is too late and quite impossible for you to do otherwise."

The room had become very quiet. John tried to pierce the gloom, to distinguish the faces of his two sponsors. He could not remember ever having asked to join this club. He frowned in an effort to concentrate. Damn this memory of mine. Where on earth did I meet these two people? Never could remember names and this infernal Christian-name business makes it worse.

" Mr. John," the voice broke in on his thoughts, " you have been in some trouble recently. The Committee wishes to hear your story. We shall help you in recalling some of the facts. Will you first tell us what you know about Janet Brooke ? "

John started at the mention of the name, but his voice, as though disconnected from his inner emotions, droned flatly, " She's dead."

" We know that. How did she die ? "

" In an accident—a car crash."

" An accident ? Are you sure ? "

" Yes, yes, I'm sure. The car skidded off the road. She was killed. I didn't do it. I had nothing to do with it, do you understand ? "

" Mr. John, I have started the train of thought ; now you will tell your story from the beginning, please." Dr. Hawley leant back in his chair and closed his eyes, waiting appreciatively.

During the questioning, John had felt as if a curtain were being lifted ; the room faded and his mind went back to the first time he had seen Janet.

It all began about a year and a half ago. I'd been out to lunch with my wife on one of the rare occasions that she came up to town. I was late in getting back to the office and found that some important work had come in unexpectedly. I had to stay very late and decided to spend the night in town. I often did this. I have a small service flat and if I didn't get home by seven o'clock Helen assumed that I would be staying there.

It was a lovely evening and as I strolled down towards my club for a meal I decided to go into a cocktail bar for a well-earned drink. How one's life can be altered by a sudden decision !

The place was deserted except for a young girl who was sitting at the bar with her head resting in her hands. I don't suppose I'd have taken any notice of her had she not, at the moment my drink was being handed to me, given a deep sigh. Glancing in her direction curiously, I noticed tears streaming down her cheeks. Her appearance so distressed me that I asked her if there were anything I could do.

" If you can work miracles—yes ; if not, I don't think so." Her voice was low-pitched and held a thrilling little huskiness.

" No, I can't work miracles, but I can buy you a drink and do my best to cheer you up. A trouble shared, you know . . ." She nearly gave a smile at my banal remark.

I bought her a drink and another for myself and suggested we should go over to one of the small glass-topped tables so as not to be disturbed. She agreed. Then getting off her stool,

she reached down with her left hand and pulled a small lever on the heavy irons that supported her left leg and which, until this moment, I had not noticed. The leg thus stiffened, she got up and, leaning heavily on a stick, limped over to the nearest table. I followed with the drinks, and as I put them down she released the knee lock, and the heavy boot that braced her foot clumped uselessly into the carpet.

"Don't look the other way and pretend you haven't noticed." Her voice stabbed at me edgily. "I think that is even worse than the outright curiosity and sympathy that I have grown to bear. I'm a cripple. Today I learned I shall always be a cripple."

She was trying to fight back her tears. She was so young and so beautiful; really beautiful, not pretty. She was tiny—I doubt if she was much over five feet. Her face had a fine chiselled loveliness with a deep forehead, high cheekbones, and large black eyes, set wide apart. She wore her hair, the deepest black I've ever seen, swept back severely and tied in a bun at the nape of her neck. Her skin was almost transparent, and she had no make-up except a vivid lipstick. Only her lips spoiled the classical features; these were too full and about them played a petulant, spoilt-child expression.

"You offered to share my troubles." She had her emotions more under control now but her hands flickered nervously round the stem of her glass, and as she spoke she would spread them out flat on their backs to show the hopelessness that her controlled voice did not express.

Her hands were lovely, the long slender fingers tipped by almond-shaped nails lacquered with the same vivid scarlet as her lips. She spoke now quite impersonally.

"I must talk. I have to share all this with someone. Until a year ago, I had a fine career ahead of me in the ballet. Oh, what happened could happen to anyone, but it happened to me. I caught a cold and didn't take any notice; the next thing I knew, I was in hospital with infantile paralysis. There were long weary weeks on my back. Time, they told me. You must be patient, they said, only a matter of time. I was given exercises and finally had to suffer them to put this useless leg in irons. Today they told me officially what I have really known for ages—that my left leg is paralysed for life. My career *was* my life. I wish I were dead."

Tears streamed unchecked from her eyes . . .

We sat there quietly drinking. It was easy to suggest she dine with me, and later I took her back to my flat. She was childish in her gratitude for the evening, anxious to please me.

I was amazed at the ardour of her desires, and later, a long time

later, lying on the settee, she spoke almost in a whisper: "Don't think badly of me, John. If you love my body, I want you to do so. I hate it. It's let me down." She went to sleep like an exhausted child.

I fell hopelessly under her spell during the ensuing months. She was a shallow little creature, but her loveliness, her youth, had completely captivated me. I was deliriously in love and I knew I must own her completely.

I was horrified at my emotions.

Helen, I knew, would never give me a divorce, yet I could not even contemplate the thought of life without Janet. It was futile to entertain any idea of going off with her because she was an expensive luxury, and it meant spending a small fortune to keep her contented. I had shown her how easy it was for her to demand the best in life, and if I failed to give it to her, she would find someone else who could. You see I had no illusions about my mistress.

Slowly I realized what I had to do.

Subconsciously the plan had been formulating for a long time and it was Janet herself who hastened me to action. Recently I had begun to suspect that she had another lover. More and more of late she had protested fatigue and refused to let me stay the night with her. (She now had her own flat for which I paid the rent.)

And one night, after just such an excuse, I saw her. I was waiting to cross the street and, as the lights changed, I saw Janet sitting in a car beside a young man. As they waited for the traffic lights, I saw him lean over and kiss her, and there came over her face a look of infinite tenderness that I had never seen before.

It frightened me. I felt I was losing her. As I walked on towards my club, I calmly decided that my wife must die.

There was an almost inaudible murmur from his audience round the table. It brought John back into this dark room. He seemed like a person slowly coming out of an anæsthetic. There was no shock in the sound that brought him back; it held only pleasurable anticipation.

"Please continue, Mr. John." At the sound of that voice, the room faded again and John picked up the threads of his story.

Helen and I had been married for nearly twenty years. Make no mistake about it, we had been in love when we were married and our love had faded gently into a pleasant enough relationship; a relationship, alas, that lacked excitement.

When a business grows at the speed with which mine had done, it is essential for a man's wife to progress with him at the

same rate. Helen didn't. I suppose she just hadn't it in her. She came from what is described as " a respectable middle-class family " and she carried that banner proudly through life; also she suffered from asthma and this confined her activities. And gradually we had drifted apart.

How can I describe her?— a fat, dumpy, comfortable, untidy little person. I was fond of her, but she had to be sacrificed for the sake of this insatiable desire of mine for Janet.

Helen and I lived in the country and she was quite content with her life. As I have told you, she accepted without demur my staying in town several nights during the week and therefore she had remained completely unsuspicious of my double life.

Although we had no children, Helen led a comparatively full life. She loved pottering in the garden, she had a lot of friends, there was her social work and her bridge club. We were members of a community that regarded us as a happy middle-aged couple. Now that I had met Janet, this uneventful existence bored me beyond measure.

How was I going to commit my crime? Well, fate played into my hands. Helen caught 'flu badly and for a sufferer from asthma, this was a serious complaint.

Our doctor wanted her to have a nurse but, playing the part of the anxious and devoted husband, I begged him to let me nurse her. I cancelled all business appointments and sat up with her night after night.

It was all so easy. She was half delirious and running a very high temperature. I left the windows open; I forgot to give essential drugs, pouring them away as though she had taken them. 'Flu developed rapidly into pneumonia and before the doctor could get her into an oxygen tent or give her any injection—she was dead.

The doctor signed the death certificate without question. Helen was buried and I was free, free to marry Janet. I could hardly wait, but wait I must.

I spent a fortnight at home playing the part of a broken-hearted widower and then I went back to the office—" to bury myself in my work "—where I had to suffer the sympathy of my staff.

That very day I rang Janet. She sounded distant and not interested, but finally agreed to meet me for lunch. She would be late, she said, because she had an appointment at her hair-dresser's.

I sat in the restaurant she had chosen, feeling as nervous as a boy on his first date. She was over half an hour late. I'd nearly forgotten how beautiful she was. She gave me a tiny, almost frightened smile.

"Hullo, John. You look very well despite everything." The flat husky voice showed little excitement at meeting me again. She looked tired, and was wearing make-up.

I ordered her a drink. "Well, darling, here's to us."

She raised her glass and drank its contents down quickly. "To us? Yes, I suppose so." She began to remove her gloves, pulling each finger of the glove off slowly, concentrating on the task. "You quite frighten me, John. You're a ruthless man. Helen didn't just die, did she? Things like that don't just happen. I wonder how you helped her to die."

The words hung between us but she never raised her eyes to look at me, and I could not deny the accusation. She stared at her crimson lacquered nails intently. "I'm jealous of you because with a single action you can get what you want out of life. Nothing can give me what I want. You saw the way people looked at me as I came into the room just now. With pity. Can't you hear what they were saying to each other?—Poor girl! Such a shame!—And now you are trying to force me into marriage."

She didn't wait for an answer but went on with a rush, and I knew that what she was saying had been rehearsed before. "I wish I were in love with you, John, then everything would be fine—but I'm not. I—I'm—fond of you, grateful for all you've given me. But I'm not in love with you, and now you've done something dreadful and I must marry you to make that dreadful thing seem worth while." She turned her face to look at me for the first time since she had come in. "Why didn't you leave things just as they were? I was giving you contentment. Why must you try to own me?"

She went on urgently, "John, I'm going away for a time. I must go away and try to think things out. When I come back, I'll know what I've got to do; but it's no good now. I just don't know."

We sat in silence for I don't know how long. I felt too sick at heart to speak and she seemed exhausted by her own words.

Finally, "Where will you go?" I asked.

"I'll just take my car and go. Don't try to get in touch with me. Leave me alone." I'd bought her a car with special hand controls which she adored. I'd never seen her so happy as when she was driving her car.

I made no attempt to argue with her. There was no argument I could use. I hadn't lost her irrevocably but I had gained nothing in killing Helen. That was the terrible thing. What happened next, I can only put down to my state of mind.

Janet had been gone about a month when I met a business acquaintance for lunch. During the course of our meal, he said

suddenly : " By the way, old man, saw a friend of yours down at Eastchurch on Monday. Young Janet Brooke. Damned attractive little thing, isn't she ? She was with young Rutledge, you know, the Rutledge car heir."

" That's a lie." I shouted at him.

" Here—steady, old boy, no need to shout at a chap like that. Or is there ? So Janet Brooke was that sort of friend, was she ? You're a cunning old devil, aren't you ? Don't blame you, either. Still, you'd better look elsewhere because I think young Rutledge was building up for the big proposal. Wedding bells written all over their faces." He chuckled and I watched him with fascinated horror. " They were staying at the Albion." He added this quietly.

The rest of that lunch was purgatory. How I sat through it I have no idea. The minute it was over, I got into my car and drove like a maniac down to Eastchurch.

I arrived just before dinner and found her in the cocktail bar. Beside her was a young man. She looked radiant in a green dinner dress and was wearing the long jade earrings that I had given her the previous Christmas.

Something made her turn and I knew she had seen me. She paused with her glass raised halfway to her lips. The scene stands out in my mind in relief—the glass in her left hand, the lights shining on her scarlet nails and making the diamonds on the ring on her third finger glisten a pinkish colour. The ring seemed to grow larger and larger as I stared.

I strode over to her and she never moved. The man beside her seemed unaware of what was going on.

" Damn you, you bitch ! Damn you ! How dare you treat me like this ? " I slapped her hard across the face and she slid from the stool to the ground. She made no movement, not a sound. But she stared back at me from the floor with hatred. The man beside her got up. For a moment he stared down at her and then he said : " So that's how it is, is it ? " He looked at me and then he hit me as hard as he could.

As the waiter and the barman rushed me out of the room, I heard him say : " A fine pair. God, what a fool I've been ! "

I got into my car and drove. Where I drove that night I have no idea. How long it was before I found myself in front of my block of flats I don't know. I sat in my car outside, feeling so sick that I burst into tears, and a man came over to me and asked me if I were John Gale.

I must have nodded for he went on : " Mr. Gale, I wonder if you could come along with me. There's been an accident. I'm a police officer and we want you to come down and identify the body of a young lady."

I hardly understood what he was saying. I must have asked him what he meant, for I heard him say: "At five o'clock this morning, the body of a young lady was found in a wrecked car that had fallen over the cliffs near Eastchurch. We are not altogether satisfied that it was an accident, but first we want a formal identification. We believe she must have known you as there was a letter addressed to you in her handbag. Her name is Janet Brooke."

Everything whirled round and I fainted. Later, I was taken to identify Janet. I was asked a few questions and then allowed to go home.

What I did with myself for the next few days I don't know. I stayed in my flat. I suppose I ate, shaved, and went through the motions of existing. Whether it was a day or a month later I don't know, but one day my door bell rang and I heard my servant let someone in. I was annoyed for I had given instructions that on no account was I to be disturbed.

I went into the hall to get rid of whoever it was and there stood two men. One of them introduced himself as a police sergeant, and there he cautioned me and told me I was being arrested for the murder of Janet Brooke.

I just stared at them. I don't believe I argued. I had neither the energy nor the desire. My solicitor, a friend of long standing, insisted that I must prepare my defence but I took little interest. He sat in my cell and told me what had happened.

"You're in a hell of a spot, John. You must try to help me or you may be found guilty. Where did you go the evening that Janet died?" I shook my head.

"There's a lot of circumstantial evidence against you," he went on. "That appalling scene at the Albion. There were over a dozen people there, all prepared to identify you and to suggest that you threatened her.

"Then there was that letter addressed to you in Janet's handbag. In it, she told you that she and young Gerald Rutledge were going to get married. That she loved him and that now you must leave her alone. She said she hadn't wanted to break it to you in this way but she hadn't been able to pluck up sufficient courage before. She said that Gerald had known nothing about you.

"Oh, it went on to explain everything and there are a lot of details about your relationship with her. It's a mess, John. There's another thing, you had lunch with a man on the day of the scene and he has come forward with a statement about the strange way you behaved when he told you of Janet's whereabouts. He is prepared to say you went off with murder in your eye."

I listened to all he had to say and asked him in a sudden burst

of curiosity, "Why murder? Why does everyone say she was murdered?"

"Oh, it was murder, all right. Two small but significant things prove that this was no accident. Janet was a cripple. She never went anywhere without a stick; she couldn't really walk without one at all. There was no stick either in the car when it was found or anywhere near it. Again, her paralysed leg was strapped in a special type of iron. The leg was quite useless and so the car she drove had a special hand clutch. Now, she always drove her car with the driving seat pulled well forward; she was such a tiny person that she had to sit right up to the wheel to see the road. To do this she had to unlock the brace at the knee because there was no room for it to stick out straight in front. When the car was found, the seat was thrust forward in the correct position but her leg brace was stiff at the knee. The joint was so made that it was impossible for it to lock itself.

"Someone must have put her into the car and pushed it over the cliff. It was murder, John, and unless you can get yourself a damned good alibi, it's going to be very difficult to prove you didn't do it."

John began to come out of the trance that had enveloped him since he began to tell his story. "Murder, gentlemen—but I didn't do it. That's all there is to tell. Except that I was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. I suppose the reprieve came through at the last minute. I am innocent of her murder, I swear it. I don't know who did it. If you need proof of my innocence, surely the pardon granted me is sufficient."

He passed a hand over his brow. He was beginning to remember now. He could see the governor of the prison coming into his cell; but he still remembered nothing after that. Not even the actual way in which the governor had told him he was reprieved—nor his reactions to this news. He wondered now what fresh evidence had come to light.

Suddenly he felt very frightened. God, what a fool he'd just been! Reprieved of one murder, he had actually confessed to another and a hitherto unsuspected one—that of Helen.

Now everyone was talking at once. They seemed to have forgotten his presence. That woman, Edith Something-or-other, was dominating the scene, standing up and talking excitedly. "I know, Dr. Hawley, that Mr. John was innocent of the murder for which he was tried—but he *did* commit murder and he is therefore fully eligible."

John found he could stand it no more. "For heaven's sake, all of you! You know so much, then tell me why I'm here, how

I was reprieved, who helped me, and why, oh why am I here ? "

There was a sudden silence. Dr. Hawley rose from his chair and came through the shadowy room to his side.

" Mr. John, the Committee has decided to grant you membership. We are pleased to welcome you to our club."

" Tell me how I was reprieved ! " Something was beginning to come back to him ; the room seemed to be getting lighter.

" My dear Mr. John, you were not reprieved. You were hanged this morning." Dr. Hawley Crippen blew his nose and smiled at Mrs. Edith Thompson and Mr. Frederick Bywaters who were holding out their hands in welcome to the new member.

* * *

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD

PRIZE-WINNERS OF CROSSWORD NO. 2

We are pleased to announce the three winners of Argosy's second Prize Crossword Competition :

Miss L. Rossi, Newgate Street, Bishop Auckland, Co. Durham.
John R. McLaren, Esq., Bouverie Avenue, Salisbury, Wilts.
C. B. Pūlman, Esq., Oakfield Road, Birmingham 12.

These readers, who sent in the first correct solutions to be checked on the closing date, each receive a one-guinea book token.

SOLUTION

Across. 1, *Dante.* 4, *Navy Lists.* 9, *Cock Robin.* 10, *Prado.* 11, *Entirely.* 12, *Arnhem.* 14, *Grace.* 16, *Rebellion.* 18, *Star-gazer.* 19, *Oscar.* 21, *Bright.* 23, *Parapets.* 26, *Annal.* 27, *Universal.* 28, *Hartshorn.* 29, *Taste.*

Down. 1, *Duck egg.* 2, *Nicotiana.* 3, *Error.* 4, *Nobel Prize.* 5, *Vine.* 6, *Leporello.* 7, *Slash.* 8, *Snowman.* 13, *Aberration.* 15, *Eggshells.* 17, *Increases.* 18, *Sabbath.* 20, *Resolve.* 22, *Inner.* 24, *Alert.* 25, *Juno.*

PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 5

Argosy's fifth Prize Crossword Competition appears on page 144. There will be one-guinea book tokens for the first three correct solutions checked on the closing date. Entries should be completed *in ink*, and posted to : ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD (No. 5), 3, Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.) to arrive by Thursday, October 8th, the closing date.

We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final.

Names of the prize-winners in this competition and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale December 10th.

Six-year-old Joe continues his adventures in his Whitechapel wonderland. Mr. Kandinsky the tailor, longing for a steam presser, the muscular Shmule entering the wrestling championship in order to buy his girl Sonia her ring, Joe himself and his mother wanting to join his father in Africa — to make all these dreams come true Joe has been to the Club Row market and bought Africana, a

COCKNEY UNICORN

by

WOLF MANKOWITZ

SHMULE had already beaten Louis Dalmatian who was, to tell the truth, a push-over, and the Stepney Thrasher was off with a broken collar-bone. So Shmule's manager, Blackie, who ran the gymnasium, thought it was a lucky opportunity for Shmule to do Turk Robert and Bully Bason on the quick, and have a go at the dreaded Python Macklin, who was anyway not in such wonderful shape, he heard, owing to his stomach ulcer proving troublesome because he couldn't leave fried food alone, not to mention the booze.

It was Shmule's big chance and Blackie fixed for him to fight Turk Robert and Bully Bason in the same week—Bully on the Monday and the Turk on the Friday.

It wasn't so bad as it sounded, Blackie said, because Bully was being paid off to be disqualified in the fourth for persistent gouging.

" Supposing," Shmule asked, " I only lose one eye, do you take half-commission ? "

" Suddenly," Blackie said to himself, " suddenly our Maccabeus has got the wind up—I'm telling you," he told Shmule—" the Bully is being paid off. Just keep your eyes closed and scream—it's too much to ask for a five-pound purse ? "

As for the Turk, he had only two tricks, a deathly rabbit-punch and a back-breaking full nelson. " You're up to that, kid," Blackie told Shmule. " I know you won't let us down by letting that deadbeat murder you." And he gave him a good rub-down.

Though he wouldn't talk to Joe about wrestling except to say it was a mug's game, Bully and the Turk were on Shmule's mind all the time. Between stitching he weaved his head from side to side, and as he lifted the iron he would suddenly duck. All Joe had to do to learn was watch.

The weather was cold, so by special arrangement with Mr. Kandinsky, Africana was sleeping in the workshop, and as the workshop had a double lock for insurance purposes it was safe.

Illustrations by James Boswell

Also, Africana liked it better in the workshop because it was warm and there was nearly always company. He lay under the bench in the nest of off-cuts, and looked with bright eyes from one face to another, although he didn't want to walk much, and had a bit of a cold.

Mr. Kandinsky was worried, which didn't make things easier. He was first of all worried about his rheumatism, which was always worse in a sharp spell. He was also worried about Shmule and all this prize-fighting. He was, into the bargain, worrying about a patent steam presser because with the work short it was getting to be more difficult to compete. And now there was the unicorn to worry about as well.

" He don't look so good to me, Joe," he said. " A little animal like that should be full of beans, jumping and skipping, not lying about the whole day with hardly appetite for a lettuce leaf unless you beg him to take it."

He bent down to Africana. " Go on, then," he said, offering a piece of leaf, " get it down, it'll do you good. *Oy*—the roimatismus is killing me. And business so bad, into the bargain."

Business was so slow that Shmule said could he spend a couple afternoons at the gymnasium ? Especially since he had the two fights coming off and needed all the training he could get. Not that he would mind how long he worked if there was the work there but, like this, even his finger muscles would be cramping up waiting for the next pair of trousers, not that he wanted to put the mockers on the business, far from it, but why should he sit here messing about making new patterns when they didn't have the work ?

" Do me a favour," said Mr. Kandinsky. " Go and wrestle."

" Can I come with you ? " Joe asked, and Shmule was so pleased to be going off he said Joe could so long as he didn't talk too much and take his mind off serious matters.

Then, after telling Joe to be quiet, Shmule didn't stop talking, all

the way to Blackie's in Middlesex Street, behind Blackie's fish shop which was his real business.

" You see," Shmule said as they walked round the back streets, " I got to think of all the angles. Take the Bully, for instance. I got to think of my self-respect. If I can beat him fair, it's better, I don't care what Blackie says. So it's no good you saying don't worry because the Bully is taking a duck."

" I didn't say don't worry," said Joe.

" I got to keep after him whether he wants to drop out or not," Shmule went on. " After all, that's his business. He can be paid off if he likes, that's not my affair. If it pays him better, good luck to him, let him lose on purpose."

" Why does it pay the Bully better to lose ? " Joe asked.

" You can't tell," Shmule said. " Maybe his manager put money for him on me and they got good odds because the Bully is an old-stager and they thought he would wrap me up no trouble. On the other hand, supposing he don't get thrown out for gouging, and I'm taking it easy, thinking, what the hell, no need to break my neck, and the Bully gives me a welt, I'm out.

" No, say what you like, no matter what, I got a fight on me hands. Then, there's the Turk. I seen him fight three or four times. True, he's only got the two grips, but never mind, you've only got one neck, he's only got to break it the once, no more.

" And he's got a nice style the Turk, even if he is a bit past it. He must be turned forty."

" So old ? " Joe asked.

" At least," Shmule said. " At that age you haven't got the speed, well you can't expect it, can you ? "

" No," said Joe.

" But you know a thing or two, all right, one or two tricks that can give somebody something to think about and no answers. I got to keep out of his way and watch out for that little opening, then rush him and give him the lot. Otherwise . . . Also, I'm giving him half a stone, and weight counts in the wrestling.

" Supposing he gets his knee into me gut, I've finished, had me lot. Just because he's got the weight. No good complaining then, is it ? It's all right for Blackie. He don't have to fight 'em, but if he did he wouldn't be so pleased. Two in a week, I ask you."

" I ask you," Joe said, " I ask you."

" It's too much, Joe," Shmule said, shaking his head as they got to Blackie's fish shop.

" I ask you," Joe said.

In the shop they were hosing the fish down, being as it was late in the afternoon and still not sold out. Blackie's wife, who had a great mane of red hair like a lion and a hoarse, whispering voice, sprayed the hose over the floor.

" Hullo, Ham," she said to Shmule (short for Hammer). " Hullo, sonny," she said to Joe.

" Gonna wrestle him, Ham ? " she said, and laughed till she coughed.

" Hullo, Hammer," said Blackie's daughter—who was also red-headed—giving Shmule a friendly smile. Sonia made a scene once because she was so friendly—too friendly, Sonia said, to anyone in trousers, and Shmule a trousers-maker into the bargain.

" 'Lo, girls," Shmule said. " Behaving ? " he hitched his shoulders.

" Going to win for me next week, Hammer ? " asked Blackie's daughter, with that smile. That was what Sonia called it, that smile. Miss Blackie looked up from under her long lashes and her eyes were a nice green-grey, very nice with deep red hair.

" For you alone, Reen," Shmule said.

" And is Sonia doing well with her weight-lifting, then ? " asked Miss Blackie, looking down.

" Such a strong girl," Mrs. Blackie whispered.

" Very nice," Shmule said.

" I do admire her," Miss Blackie said. " Sometimes I wish I was a bit more developed myself," and she gave Shmule that smile again.

" This way, Joe," Shmule said.

" That Miss Blackie has got nice eyes," Joe observed.

" I got no time for these things," Shmule said.

In the gymnasium Blackie and Oliver, the second, were putting Phil, the coloured boy, through his paces. Blackie smoked a cigar and watched closely, grunting every time Phil hit the bag. Oliver was a punchie and you couldn't knock him out, though if he hung one on you, you knew it. He was a porter when there was work at Spitalfields Fruit Market, and could carry eight baskets on his head at once. He helped out as second and would give anyone a fight for five shillings, hit him all you like.

Now he was crouching by the bag his fists following Phil's. The coloured boy was covered with sweat and his eyes stared fiercely at the bag as if it might hit him back if he wasn't careful. Blackie saw Shmule come and waved his cigar.

" All right, Phil," he said, " turn it in." Oliver sat Phil down, puffing and blowing, and whispered into his ear as he rubbed him down.

" Good boy," Blackie said, when Shmule told him he was putting in extra training, " good boy." Shmule went into the little changing-room at the other end of the gym.

" Put 'em up," Blackie said to Joe, squaring off to him, " put 'em up and let's see what you're made of ! "

Joe got into the proper position of defence, and Blackie sized him up, still puffing at his cigar. Then Joe suddenly let go and punched Blackie all over his stomach so that he swallowed some smoke.

" Turn it in, kid," choked Blackie. " I wasn't ready. See the kid," he said to Oliver, " a champ in the making. Save it for Phil," he said to Joe, " he's in training."

" What your name, boy ? " Phil asked Joe. His eyes were not staring now, and he had his breath back.

" Joe," said Joe.

" Watch that old defence, boy," Phil said " you was wide open.

You got to watch that old defence or you is cooked. Like this." He squared up to the punch-bag again, shadow-boxing it like mad.

"Easy, easy, Phil," said Oliver. "Easy, easy, boy, don't tax yourself, Phil."

"Was you watching the old defence, boy?" Phil asked Joe.

Joe nodded his head.

"Now you show me, boy," Phil told him.

Joe took up the position of defence again and jumped into action, weaving round Oliver while Phil shouted, "Box him, boy, box him there, boy!"

Joe was puffed afterwards. "I watched the old defence," he said.

"You're all right, kid," Oliver said. "Always lead with the right and follow with the left, one two, one two, like that. Don't forget, one two, one two."

"One two, one two," said Joe, punching hard.

"And keep up the old defence, boy," said Phil.

"The old defence," said Joe.

Meanwhile Shmule was limbering up. He wore crimson trunks with a white hammer in the corner, and as he lifted the weights his muscles stood up in great bands. Blackie was watching him and rubbing his hands.

"What a boy!" he said. "What a boy, Olly, what a boy, Phil! Run a couple of rounds with him, Phil. Take Phil for a couple, Hammer," he said.

Joe watched them wrestling for a while, but though they threw one another about, and grunted and puffed and shouted, beating the canvas, he couldn't see how it was done. First they walked round one another with their legs bowed and their arms bent. That was all right. Then suddenly one jumped on the other, but it was usually the one who jumped first who finished up with his back on the floor, grunting, while the other one twisted his leg backwards and forwards.

While Joe was examining the gym, which was a big shed where they used to smoke fish in the days when it paid, and still smelt of fish, Shmule won the bout. Joe didn't notice him winning, because he was trying to lift himself up on the horizontal bars, but his arms weren't developed enough. But he knew Shmule won because Miss Blackie was watching from the door, and suddenly there was a groan from Phil, and a quick beating on the canvas from his hands with the palms which were quite pink, and Miss Blackie shouted out, "Great, Hammer!"

Afterwards, they had fish and chips in the frying-tonight part of the shop, Blackie heaping their plates with great mountains of golden chips and fillets of plaice, which were very good because the establishment used only the best frying oil.

While they ate, Blackie talked to Shmule about his two coming fights and what he had heard about how both the Bully and the Turk were finished.

"Get your scissors well up," Blackie told him.

"And watch the old defence," Joe told him. "Lead with the right, one two, one two."

As Joe took up the position of defence two chips dropped off his plate, one two, onto Mrs. Blackie's clean floor.

No one expected Shmule to lose his two fights, but at the same time to win two fights in the one week is very good and you shouldn't expect it. Consequently, when Bully Bason was disqualified in the fourth round due to persistent gouging, and Shmule went the whole length with Turk Robert to win on points after a hard fight and fairly clean, everyone was delighted.

People kept dropping into the workshop to congratulate Shmule and ask him how it felt to be a champ in the making, and what he thought his chances were against the dreaded Python, and how their money was on him. It was just as well work was a bit short, otherwise it would have been held up, and that means dissatisfied customers, which is very bad for business. So that, if business is bad anyway and held up, at least you aren't losing goodwill.

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Kandinsky, "with the best goodwill in the world, a patent presser can still be a help, because in the long run people want good work, but they want it cheap as well, and how can handwork be so cheap ?"

Business all over the East End was, as a matter of fact, a bit slow, and Joe's mother got a couple of days off, not that it was a holiday. She was piece-working at the milliner's and consequently didn't get paid if there was no work.

Madame Rita, her boss, a big fat man with very fine fingers, swore that it was often like that just before the spring started and the weather was extra cold for the time of the year. Without sunshine to wear them in, who wanted hats ?

But Joe's mother had plenty to do at home. She ran herself up a dress on Mr. Kandinsky's machine, and she made Joe three shirts and a linen jacket for the summer, if it ever came. The net result of all this being that Joe was at a loose end, because women don't talk much when they are making things, and there were so many people in and out of the workshop to talk to Shmule and Mr. Kandinsky about the wrestling, that he couldn't get a word in.

As for Africana, except for his bit of a sniffle, which was only seasonable since most people were coughing and hawking and sniffing and sneezing, he was all right, although he didn't want to walk about very much. Joe could still play the Africa game silently, but it wasn't so real indoors, especially if you had to be quiet, and you had to in front of so many people.

The morning the spring came, Joe woke up in a circle of sunlight with a breeze blowing softly upon his face. Lying still with his eyes wide open, he listened to his mother's breathing, like the sea in the distance, a ship going to Africa. But because it was the spring Joe agreed it was only a dream, and jumping out of bed, ran downstairs without his slippers on to see if Africana had noticed the welcome visitor.

Africana was, indeed, awake, and so full of beans you would never guess he hadn't enjoyed the best of health. In view of the

weather perhaps it wasn't surprising, because with the sun up in the sky, ripe and heavy like a solid gold balloon, everyone feels it will be a wonderful day, and sometimes it is.

In the yard, the stones already felt warm. The rotten wood fencing, which oozed in wet weather like a crushed beetle, was dry as if washed up on a beach somewhere near pirate treasure. A weed had grown in a minute of the night on the small patch of bare ground which in the sunshine was earth, not dirt any more. It might grow into a palm tree.

Africana, awake in his house, scratched at the walls eager to play, and when Joe lifted the hook on the door he at once ran out. There wasn't time for a complete game, however, because Mr. Kandinsky came into the yard in his carpet slippers and quilted dressing-gown blinking his eyes still creased up from sleeping. He sent Joe up at once to get dressed, and put Africana back into his house until after breakfast at least.

As he ran upstairs Joe felt his own face just below the eyes, but there were no creases. He guessed that Mr. Kandinsky had more skin to work with.

Joe's mother's boss, Madame Rita, was quite right, there was more work going in the millinery once the worst of the winter was over. Before the spring arrived, women felt it near, and began to peep round at hats.

They were already, during the short spells of sunshine, looking into the window of Madame Rita's shop and saying that it wouldn't really suit me, Sadie, it's for a younger woman, and Sadie was saying, but it would, Ada, it's just your style. The next stage was, they came into Madame Rita's and tried on the hats. They tried twenty hats with the brims up, then down, then sideways, then without the trimming, then with more trimming.

Madame Rita watched them, his hands on his large belly, a soft smile on his face, a small black cheroot between his teeth, and as they tried one hat after another, with or without trimming, he made little soft cooing noises.

"Pardon me, lady," he would say eventually, "the brim up is more your style." With a push here and a push there, he made the hats suit the faces they had to sit over. In the end the ladies sometimes bought the hats.

Consequent upon there being more work in the millinery, Joe's mother was kept busier and busier at Madame Rita's, putting on more and more trimming as fashion demanded, and though this is tiring it is just what the doctor ordered for piece-workers. But they have in consequence to hurry over breakfast.

The day spring came, Joe and his mother had boiled eggs, and before she had her coat on, Joe kissed her good morning and ran down to the yard—so you can tell how he hurried if his mother hadn't even left yet, and she in such a hurry, as well.

The reason why Joe was in such a hurry that morning was that in his sleep he had thought of a new game and wanted to see if it would work.

When Joe's mother was leaving, she looked in at Mr. Kandinsky's workshop to say good morning to him and tell him that she might be late, and not to worry. Mr. Kandinsky pointed to the back window and nodded.

Looking out, Joe's mother saw Joe talking to Africana, and waving to someone a long way off. She thought how the back of his neck was still like a baby's, delicate, with a little gentle valley down the centre. Though it wasn't so surprising because he was, after all, almost a baby.

How much they had to learn, what a terrible lot they had to learn! She ran away to Madame Rita's to trim spring hats for those who had already learned what suited them.

All that morning Joe and Africana played together in the yard which, due to the dry rotten fencing, had become a ship, old wooden walls. Joe was the captain and Africana on one occasion mutinied and ran to the other end of the yard, frightened by Joe shouting out, "Fasten your jibs and loosen your mainsails, you lousy lubbers," which is only what captains do say.

That nearly spoilt the game, but they went on after a pause for Africana to eat a cabbage leaf. They visited the South Sea Islands where Joe drank coconut milk, which is quite like ordinary milk. Mr. Kandinsky brought it out for him in an enamel mug. They found a pirate treasure just under the lavatory door, a small black pebble which when properly cut and polished would be a black diamond.

Then at last they came to Africa and had a few adventures there, but Joe was feeling like a talk with Mr. Kandinsky, and Africana's sniffle had started again. They hurried up to the city, met Africana's parents and Joe's father and came home quickly. By air, as a matter of fact, the unicorns growing large wings like geese for the purpose.

The reason why Joe felt like a talk was that though it was a nice thing to have a unicorn, Africana often didn't seem very interested in playing. Sometimes he sat down in the middle of a game and just chewed, which is certainly a bit irritating, even if he did have a cold. Joe was worried too because Africana still wasn't growing much and his horn was so tiny it couldn't even grant small wishes yet.

Joe once wished on it for his mother to come home at three o'clock and take him to the pictures, and instead she came home at turned six and cried because there was no letter from his father.

Whilst locking Africana up Joe practised talking and spitting at the same time, like the sandwich-board man in the market. It was a question of holding the spit loose round the tip of your tongue which you kept between your teeth, and blowing when you spoke. With a little more time Joe would have it perfect, but where did they get those sandwich-boards from?

Joe went into the workshop. "Where do they get those sandwich-boards from, Mr Kandinsky?" he asked.

"Where?" answered Mr. Kandinsky. "A question!"

"From the kingdom of heaven?" suggested Joe.

" Only the religious ones," Mr. Kandinsky said.

" From the agency near the arches," Shmule said, without looking up from a turn-up he was turning up. " I know because Blackie has got six of them going round with me on them versus the dreaded Python Macklin at the Baths next Saturday night. No wonder I'm worried."

" Shmule," Mr. Kandinsky cried, " you never said nothing."

" Can anyone get sandwich-boards near by the arches ?" asked Joe.

" You fighting the dreaded Python so soon ? " Mr. Kandinsky went on. " How come you are fighting him ? Him next to the champion and you a new boy in wrestling, almost."

" Look," Shmule said, " Python is warming up, see ? He's near the crown five six years. Already he fights the champ five times. Four times he loses, once he draws. Now he wants plenty of fights, get in form and then knock off the champ who is boozing too much anyway, quick. After, plenty exhibition bouts with big money for a couple year, and buy a pub in Wapping. So with the shortage in class wrestlers, Blackie does me a favour. Also knocking off the Turk and Bully didn't help me. I'm a goner."

" It's wonderful," Mr. Kandinsky said, " to think in my workshop a future champion. Wonderful."

" Wonderful ! " Shmule replied, throwing his needle and thread down. " That bloody Python is going to break my neck ! "

" The sandwich-boards, Joe," said Mr. Kandinsky. " The sandwich-boards is an interesting case."

" Blast the sandwich-boards," said Joe. " That bloody Python."

" *Go to the corner and get three rolls*," shouted Mr. Kandinsky in a voice of thunder, and Joe ran out. " A fine attitude to life," Mr. Kandinsky told Shmule, his mouth turned down at the corners, which was always a bad sign.

When Joe came back he found that Shmule and Mr. Kandinsky were not on speaking terms, except for essentials like " Pass the black thread," and " Give me the shears." Joe couldn't break the ice by talking about what was on his mind before he thought of the sandwich-boards, because he couldn't remember what it was, so after dinner he went out and spent the afternoon helping Mavis in the shop. At least, Mavis thought it was always a wonderful day.

The day before Shmule's fight with Python Macklin, the workshop was closed. Shmule was getting into top shape down at the gymnasium, and Blackie was giving every assistance, including sending out of his own pocket a case of bad whisky to Python, because even if it would be hell for the stomach ulcers, who can resist the gift of an unknown admirer ?

Mr. Kandinsky did have, to tell the truth, a couple of things he could have got on with, but instead he spent the morning at Shafchick's vapour bath. By permission of Madame Rita, Joe spent the morning down at the milliner's with his mother, which certainly made a change from all the bad temper and arguments in Kandinsky's workshop. Furthermore, the girls at Madame Rita's gave you sweets

all the time, and had a completely different kind of conversation.

Joe's mother was the trimmer, and there was another girl called Sophie who was learning the trimming from her. There was the machinist, Mrs. Kramm, who was old and had a chest, and a pretty assistant from the shop named Ruby, but called Lady R. Ruby was very nice to Joe but she treated the others, even Joe's mother, a bit haughty. As soon as she went out of the workroom they talked about her.

" What a fine lady, I don't think," said Sophie.

" Some lady, I should say, and what was she before ? A little snot-nose giving the boys eyes the whole time," wheezed Mrs. Kramm.

" She's very pretty," Joe's mother said, picking up a small bunch of artificial cherries. " And good at her job."

" That you can say again," Mrs. Kramm said. " That job she can do all right, I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy, such a job as she can do so well." She pressed the treadle of her machine so that the thread shot through the needle like lightning.

" Mrs. Kramm," Joe's mother said, looking towards Joe, " I'm surprised at you. After all, it's only a rumour."

" Oh no, it's not, Becky," Sophie said quickly. " I've seen him after her behind the gown rail, carrying on something terrible."

" Sophie," Joe's mother said, " the child."

" Here you are, Joe," Sophie said, " I've found a caramel in silver paper for you."

" Thank you very much," said Joe, because they were the soft kind with a nut in the middle, although he would rather have heard some more about Lady R and Madame Rita. But it was just as well Sophie stopped when she did because while he was taking the silver paper off the caramel carefully so as not to tear it, who should come in but Lady R herself ?

" Becky dear," she said to Joe's mother, "could Joe go an errand ? Would you go an errand, Joe sweetie, for Auntie Ruby, dolly ? "

" Certainly he could," Joe's mother said, though Joe didn't as a rule run errands for dollies.

" Will you, dolly ? " asked Lady R bending down and putting her face right close to his. " For me ? "

" All right," Joe said. Lady R smelt nice, at least, and she had large brown eyes and a smooth dark skin and oily black hair, very smooth and curled into a bun.

" Bless you, baby," Lady R said, and suddenly she gave Joe a fat kiss on his cheek, which, though better than a pinch, is still a nuisance.

The errand was to go round the corner and collect Lady R's genuine French calf handbag which was having its clip repaired. When he was coming back through the shop with the handbag (which was a sack of coal over his shoulder), he saw Madame Rita and Lady R behind the gown rail, and what Sophie said was true.

Back in the workroom his mother got out her handkerchief and licked it and rubbed off Lady R's lipstick, which meant that it had been on his face all the time and he didn't know, which proves you shouldn't go errands for dollies.

" Don't lick me," Joe said.

"Keep still, Joe," replied his mother.

"If you lick me clean, you should lick Madame Rita too, because his face is even worse."

"*Oy*," wheezed Mrs. Kramm, "the cat is in the bag. What goings-on! For a respectable woman it's terrible."

After Joe had been cleaned up he went down into the cellar where there were a whole lot of old dummies, coloured crêpe papers, and boxes. Although he got filthy it did allow the women to talk about Lady R, which is all women want to do, anyway. For his part he got down to a serious game of Club Row.

Joe was being an Indian fortune-teller with a green remnant round his head, when he had a happy thought. He thought how the women wanted to talk about Lady R, and how Shmule wanted to win another fight although he had already won two, and how Mr. Kandinsky still wanted a patent presser, and his father hadn't sent for them yet.

So, Joe thought, everybody really is always saying *I wish, I wish*, and always wanting things. And he improved being a fortune-teller by having Africana with him. Africana wasn't very much bigger, but his horn was coming along nicely, just big enough for about five or six wishes.

Joe set out four boxes on which he made drawings with a piece of flat chalk he kept in his pocket for emergencies. One of his mother in a hat, one of Mr. Kandinsky, one of Shmule, and one of everybody else, including Sonia and Mavis. Then he led Africana, the wish-maker, to each box.

After what was necessary was explained to Africana, he was very glad to bend his head so that his horn touched the drawing on each box. And that was how the wishes were granted. All this took a good deal of work, so it was not until Sophie came down to the cellar to call him for dinner that the job was done.

When he went upstairs he still had the green remnant round his head, and Lady R, who was eating a salt-beef sandwich, waved a pickled cucumber at him and called him the Sheik of Araby, dolly. If Joe didn't find something to do in the afternoon she would spoil everything, because she was that type. It was good luck that Mr. Kandinsky called in while Joe was eating his second jam sandwich, and asked Joe if he would like to come round with him to the Union.

At the Union they placed bets with the man who was making the book, and Mr. Kandinsky said as it was a special occasion he would put a shilling on for Joe. One man said to another, "Even if he don't win I don't want to make a crust out of that lousy Python Macklin who is, without doubt, one of the dirtiest fighters in the ring today. Also, if Shmule wins it's good for the tailors, and we should all be behind him, even if he loses."

Joe put down the buttered roll he was eating. "I know Shmule will be the winner," he said.

They looked at him in silence for a moment. "Put another bob on, Hymie," said the one.

" Out of the mouths of babes," said Mr. Kandinsky. Just at that moment, one of the old men stopped clicking dominoes and said to Mr. Kandinsky, " Kandinsky, you want a patent presser ? My brother-in-law, the one with the big factory—"

" Big factory ! " the other old man said.

" You got a bigger factory ? " the first old man asked.

" So ? " asked Mr. Kandinsky.

" He just got a new patent presser for his big factory and he's chucking out the old one."

" It works ? " asked Mr. Kandinsky.

" To look costs nothing," the old man said.

" So I'll look," replied Mr. Kandinsky, and patted Joe's head.

Joe was very pleased, especially when you remember that Africana wasn't really with him in the cellar at Madame Rita's. It must have been the green remnant, because you can never tell where an odd bit of magic is going to turn up, so why not in the cellar of Madame Rita's ? Joe thought they had better get home quickly now, because it might start to happen any minute.

The first thing Joe did when they got home was to go into the yard and thank Africana. He put his arm round his neck and kissed him gently on the head, next to his horn bud. Africana coughed and his head jerked up and hit Joe's jaw, making him bite his tongue.

The following day the weather was cold again. It was going to be one of those springs which stops and starts, unable to make up its mind whether to stay or not. One moment the stone streets were pink and bright in the sunshine, and the next they were grey and dirty again, the sun sunk away somewhere behind a million chimneys on a million slate roofs.

But though Saturday morning brought no quick pools of sunlight and Fashion Street looked blank and dead in the grey light, no one bothered, for they were all impatient for the evening. Once the evening comes, what does it matter how bright or dull the day has been ? So far as the evening is concerned, all days are bright, and tomorrow can be still brighter.

Hurry along tomorrow, a brighter day, and for an overture, let the evening bring great moments of life such as the spectacular fight between the Aldgate Hammer and the dreaded Python Macklin. And for the sake of tailors everywhere, let the tailor win.

Shmule gave Mr. Kandinsky four seats in the first row for Joe and his mother and Sonia and himself. The fights didn't begin until half past seven, and Shmule's bout came up an hour later. Mr. Kandinsky was going to get them there in good time for Shmule's fight but he would in no circumstances hear of them seeing the fights which came before.

" We are not," said Mr. Kandinsky, " savages to go and watch the gladiators fight and to enjoy the struggles of people we don't know. Shmule is our own boy so we must encourage him, not have a good time while other people get broken necks. If it wasn't for Shmule fighting we would never go, not in a hundred years."

And even Sonia who enjoyed wrestling even if she didn't know the wrestlers—and she knew most of them, of course—had to wait round the house talking about her trousseau with Joe's mother until it was time to leave.

Africana was shivering, and Joe tried to make him comfortable in his house, which had had so many bits and pieces tacked on to it through the winter that it looked like a wooden patchwork quilt. It was a shame that animals weren't allowed at the wrestling, because if Shmule did win, it would be Africana's doing, but Joe promised to tell Africana everything in the morning.

Anyhow, Africana's cough was quite bad, and he wouldn't take any throat linctus even on cubes of sugar, and what with the break in the weather making it treacherous for bronchial complaints, it was perhaps just as well for Africana to stay at home. Joe told everybody that Africana wasn't very well, and being the first dressed, he went out to have a word with Mavis on the subject.

The street looked quite different at night. Great deeps of shadow gathered in the corners, and the small shops were warm with lamps. The baker's was gas and spluttered, but Mavis's were electric and steady. On the corner there was a barrow with a big naphtha lamp spitting away white and blue over it, and two large iron braziers with iron trays red-hot on them, roasting chestnuts and baking potatoes.

Someone stood by the barrow and Joe was surprised to see it was the man who helped the Eel King on Sundays, so it looked as if with the coming of the night everyone became someone else. Even Mavis looked different, older and paler in the yellow light, with tired markings on her face, her flowered overalls dirty from where she had clasped bins of potatoes all day long. She was surprised to see Joe up and about at that time of night.

" You do look a toff, Joe," she said, " in long trousers and a jacket to match, a real toff. Where are you off to ? You should be in bed."

" Yes, they are nice," Joe said, putting his hands deep into the pockets of his long trousers. " They have real flies, with buttons."

" I suppose old Mr. Kandinsky run them up for you," Mavis said. " He run up all my old dad's."

" You look a bit old, Mavis," Joe said. " The whole street looks sort of different at night."

" I am a bit old, dear, I reckon," said Mavis, " and with the end of the day you feel it more."

" You'll have to hurry because we're going soon," Joe said, and told her about Shmule's fight.

" I shan't come, Joe dear," Mavis said. " There's still a lot to do and early-morning market to think about. Would you like a nice apple ? "

" Thank you," said Joe, taking a large bite of the russet apple she handed him.

" How's your little unicorn ? " added Mavis, throwing a soft tomato into a box where it burst juicily.

" That's what I was going to tell you," Joe said. " He's got this

bad cold on the chest and coughs all the time, and he's not interested in anything, and won't touch the linctus even on cubes of sugar. Do you think it's the consumption ? "

Mavis stopped sorting for a moment. " He never was very strong, you know, Joe. He was always a delicate little thing, and this has been a rotten winter for the best of us."

" Will you have a look at him, Mavis ? " Joe said.

Mavis closed the shop and they walked down to the house. They went through to the yard, and Mavis wrapped Africana in a piece of blanket and brought him into the workroom. In the light from the naked bulb over Mr. Kandinsky's bench Africana looked pinched and sick, and Mavis's face was serious.

While she examined Africana, Joe heard Mr. Kandinsky call from the other room and went to see him. Mr. Kandinsky was walking about in polished boots wearing a combination woollen vest and long pants.

" I can't find them blankety trousers," he said. " Can you imagine, Joe," he added, " a trousers-maker without a pair of trousers to his back ? Here they are." Grunting, he drew a pair of striped black trousers out from beneath the bed-clothes and pulled them on.

Joe told him that Mavis was in the workroom having a look at Africana, who wasn't at all well. Joe made his face serious like Mavis, the lips pressed tight together.

" That animal," Mr. Kandinsky said, " has he ever been not sick ? "

" Maybe we should send him back to Africa, to his mother and father," Joe said.

" Africa ? " asked Mr. Kandinsky. " What's with Africa ? "

" To the other unicorns," Joe said, a bit annoyed because Mr. Kandinsky wasn't thinking.

" Oh yes, yes, yes," said Mr. Kandinsky. " Africa. Maybe we should. Quite right. Have a wine cherry, but only one."

Mr. Kandinsky's bedroom was almost filled by a big mahogany bed with two large feather beds on it. A huge wardrobe stuffed with clothes and books and remnants took up one wall. The other wall had a small fireplace choked with coloured crêpe paper.

But in the corner was a small barrel in which Mr. Kandinsky made cherry wine. It was the best thing in the room, with a little tap and a mug hanging from it, full of soaked black cherries scooped from the bottom of the barrel, making the room smell always of cherries and wine.

Joe took a cherry and put it into his mouth. He tasted the wine while the cherry was still on his lips. Then he bit through to the stone slowly so that the wine taste spread right through his mouth.

" So," said Mr. Kandinsky, " I'm ready. Just let me put on my watch. This was my father's own watch and chain, Joe. A real watch, with an albert. So, lead on, Macduff. Forward to the big fight ! "

In the workroom Mavis was rubbing Africana's chest slowly, and talking to him in a whisper.

" Mavis," said Mr. Kandinsky, " nice to see you. You coming to the fight ? "

" This animal isn't at all well, Mr. Kandinsky," said Mavis, and she looked in Joe's direction, and moved her head.

" Joe," said Mr. Kandinsky, " you can take one more cherry and take some upstairs for your mother and Sonia."

When Joe had left, Mavis said to Mr. Kandinsky, " This poor little soul's in awful pain."

" *Oy* ! " said Mr. Kandinsky.

" It's cruel to leave him," said Mavis, and she seemed suddenly very hard and determined. " It's cruel."

" What must be, must be," said Mr. Kandinsky. " But wait till we go."

" That man should never have sold it to him in the first place. How could it live in Fashion Street ? " She stroked the little animal's head just where its stunted horn buds grew so close together as to appear one horn. " Poor little kid," she said.

" You're right," said Mr. Kandinsky with a sigh. " How can a kid like this grow in Fashion Street ? It's not strong enough. I'll find something to tell the boy."

Joe's mother and Sonia came down the stairs still talking about Sonia's trousseau. She had a nightdress of pure silk and another one with Flemish lace neck and hem, a shame, almost, to wear them, except in hospital.

Joe said good night to Mavis, who was holding Africana shivering in the blanket. Then, pleased to go into the dark street again, he hurried ahead of Mr. Kandinsky and the women.

" *One kid,*" sang Mr. Kandinsky quietly, " *which my father bought for two farthings.*"

In the Whitechapel Road it was all bright lights and crowds of people, smart as paint, taking a Saturday night stroll after working through the week as machinists and underpressers and cabinet-makers.

They queued at the Roxy for the second house, two big pictures, and an acrobat turned somersaults in the road for pennies, and sang *Any Old Iron*, jangling a string of real medals. They crowded into restaurants for lemon tea, and swelled out of the public houses, waving bottles, their arms about each other's necks, their children waiting at the doors with glasses of lemonade clasped to their chests.

They walked slowly along, bright ties and high-heeled patent-leather shoes, eating chips out of newspaper, careful not to let the vinegar drop on to their new clothes. Arm-in-arm they walked, in trilby hats, brims down, girl-friends with bright lips and dark eyes and loud laughter, mothers and fathers arguing together, calling to children licking toffee-apples, taking no notice, old men talking quietly, raising their eyebrows, knowing the truth of things.

Joe strode ahead of his mother who chatted with Mr. Kandinsky, while Sonia dawdled talking to a girl with heavy pencilled eyebrows and glossy silk stockings, out with her new fiancé who was a bookie's runner and flash, with wide padded shoulders to his blue double-breasted suit.

Joe took giant strides past Russian Peter with his crooked beard and Russian peaked cap. Russian Peter usually had wreaths of garlic cloves and pyramids of home-pickled cucumbers on his barrow, a large box with handles mounted on two wheels, but now he had a tray with packets of sweets and chewing-gum and toffee-apples.

Instead of calling out, " Cumber, knobbel, cumber, knobbel," as he usually did, he said, " Taffee eppls, taffee eppls," in the same high voice. Russian Peter's cucumbers were pickled by a special recipe he brought with him from Russia, with his peaked cap. Joe went back to his mother for a toffee-apple. Sure enough, it had a special taste, strange black treacle.

They allowed plenty of time for the walk to the baths, which was just as well, because what with Sonia saying hullo to all her friends and their new fiancés, and Mr. Kandinsky talking to this one and that, and different people asking Joe's mother how was his father, they would be lucky to get there at all.

As it was, when they arrived at the baths, Joe heard a great roar from inside, and thought, that's it, that's the end of the fight, we've missed it. But they hadn't. It was still the last round of the fight before.

For the Saturday-night wrestling, the swimming-baths were boarded over, which was a surprise to Joe because he had been wondering how they could wrestle in the baths. There were big lights over a ring in the middle, but you could make out the diving-boards at one end, dim in the darkness, with canvas sheets hanging over them.

There was no water beneath the boards, though, because Joe dropped a small stone through the boards and there was no splash. It was like the railings over the pavements in the streets. If you made up your mind they were fixed, it was all right.

People sat in rows, on seats in front and benches behind, while further back still they stood on wide steps, sitting on the floor in the intervals.

Men went round with trays selling hokey-pokey ice-creams, roasted peanuts, and cold drinks, and there was a great hum of noise which during the fights quietened down so that only one or two voices could be heard over the grunting of the wrestlers. Two wrestlers were tied up with one another on the floor of the ring, one of them grunting as he pressed down harder and harder, and the other shouting out, " Oh, oh, oh, oh," every time he was pressed. He wore a red mask, but he was losing all the same.

Someone called out, " Wheel 'em out," and someone else shouted, " Carve up," and a red-headed woman screamed, " Tear his arms off, Mask ! "

All around, people munched peanuts and drank ice-cold drinks out of bottles. As Joe sat down a man in a big coat started to eat a sandwich and a pickled cucumber at once. At the end of the row where they were sitting, Joe saw Madame Rita and Lady R.

Madame Rita had his arm round Lady R. He shouted, " Chuck 'em out, they're empty," waving a cigar in his other hand.

Lady R watched the wrestlers closely. Her eyes stared and her lips moved in a small tight smile, and when one threw the other, she clasped her hands together, breathing out hard between her teeth. Then, when they finished, she sank back in her seat and looked round with shining eyes at Madame Rita, who squeezed her shoulder.

The end of the fight came while Mr. Kandinsky was buying them roasted peanuts. The bell rang, and one of the wrestlers, puffing and blowing, had his arm held up by the referee, while the other one still writhed on the floor. Half the people cheered, and the other half booed, while the two wrestlers left the ring, sweating hard, their dressing-gowns draped over their shoulders. One of them tripped on the ropes.

There was a good echo in the baths, although with all the shouting and laughing it was difficult to hear it, but sometimes there was a gap in the noise, people were suddenly quiet as if getting their wind, and then one voice would ring out and the echo pick the words up and throw them back into the smoke and the smell of ozone.

Joe would have liked to shout for the echo but while it was all right under the arches, you didn't like to in front of so many people, and, anyhow, as soon as you decided to try it, the noise started again. "Wheel 'em in," they shouted. "Money back! Get on with it!" But nothing happened because it was the interval.

At the ends of the aisles, St. John's men in uniforms with polished peaks and white bands sat looking out for people to faint, but no one did. Programme-sellers went up and down shouting out that the lucky number got two ringsides for next week, and Madame Rita bought two more, just to show off.

The hokey-pokey men in white jackets did very well, and almost everyone was sucking orange and pink ice-creams or drinking from bottles or eating peanuts, crunching the shells with their feet.

Then, just as the crowd was getting bored with lucky programmes and hokey-pokey, and restless for the big fight to start, the M.C. climbed into the ring.

There was a great roar, and though he held up his arms, it went on. He shook his arms, turning from one side to the other, and the dicky-front of his evening suit opened a little.

"Ladees and Gentlemen," he shouted, "your attention, if you please, ladees, your attention, gentlemen, please." The crowd quietened and he smiled. "For your entertainment, at great expense, Sam Spindler, the well-known harmonist, will entertain you."

There was a groan as Sam Spindler, a thin bald-headed man in a Russian silk blouse with red ruching, and black trousers cut wide at the bottom but tight in the waist, climbed through the ropes with a piano-accordion, all ivory and silver and red enamel, on his back.

He bowed twice and played *Tiger Rag*, getting the tiger so well that lots of people threw pennies into the ring when he finished. Then he played a medley of songs like *My Old Dutch* and *Tipperary* and everyone sang, but when he stopped, took his accordion off, and started to tap-dance, the crowd began to boo and he had to play again, which was a shame because Joe was interested in tap-dancing

and liked to watch the arms and the legs bent at the knees and the little head jerks.

A lot more pennies were thrown, but someone shouted, " We want Python," and a whole crowd took it up. Another crowd answered, " We want Hammer," and soon you couldn't hear Sam playing at all. He stopped and looked down at the M.C.'s seat with a worried expression on his face.

The M.C. came up and thanked Sam, who was picking up his pennies. He spread out a big poster on the floor and started to read out the programme for next week. But the noise was so great he gave up, and beckoned towards the dark door through which the other wrestlers had passed after their fight. A little wiry man in shirt-sleeves and blue braces came bounding up the aisle, and leaped into the ring. After him marched the wrestlers.

First Shmule, in a crimson dressing-gown gleaming in the light, with Blackie and Oliver bustling round him. A man leaned over to pat his back as he passed, and when he sprang into the ring there was a quite big cheer. Shmule bowed towards the cheers and looked proudly at the small group who booed.

He waved to Joe, and Joe waved back, while Sonia blew kisses and Mr. Kandinsky said, " A fine boy, good luck to him." Then Shmule started stretching himself so as not to lose a moment's development.

After him, with his manager, came the dreaded Python, a man with a square blue jaw, like polished rock. The Python wore a black silk dressing-gown and a white towel round his neck, and he towered over the people about him. He climbed into the ring, not so full of spring as Shmule but with one powerful hitch of his arm.

There was, true, a bigger cheer for Python, but Shmule's friends booed hard, Joe hissed like a goose, Sonia shouted out, " Carcass meat ! " and Mr. Kandinsky said, " What a bull ! "

The M.C. introduced Shmule first. He called him the white hope of Aldgate, the sensational young former amateur-championship contender, a clean-fighting local boy, and so on and so forth. All the while the Python was baring his teeth and growling and shaking his fist at Shmule's supporters.

Shmule had slipped out of his crimson dressing-gown and now his muscles rippled in the ring lights, his spotless white hammer shining like a star against the crimson shorts. Oliver and Blackie clustered round his corner with towels and pails and a chair for him to sit on between rounds.

They looked worried, although after all that saying he was a goner, Shmule looked as if nothing could ever frighten him. There was a fresh feeling about him, as if he felt there were so many tailors expecting him to give a good fight, especially with the trade being so up and down, and so much unemployment, they lent him the strength they had been saving for work.

The dreaded Python Macklin was very angry. He strained like a fierce bulldog at the rope, just waiting for the bell to sound to throw himself on Shmule.

The black hair on the Python stood up in fury and he ground his teeth together. When the M.C. pointed in his direction and called out his name, famous contender for the championship of the world, and veteran of the ring all over Europe, the Python drew drew himself up and the muscles on his chest and back were swollen with pride and power. He grinned, his teeth clamped tight together, and when the red-haired woman screamed out, " Murder him, Py ! " he stared at her as if he was hungry and she was a juicy steak.

" A forty-minute contest," the M.C. shouted through his megaphone, " of eight five-minute rounds, for a purse of not ten, not twenty, but twenty-five pounds."

He drew the two men together and whispered to them, the Python sneering, Shmule looking serious. Mr. Kandinsky said again, "Good luck,"and then the bell rang. In the sudden silence it echoed well.

Joe sat with his seat tipped up to see over the head of the man in front. This man had a head like a smooth water-melon, with a bit of hair round the edges, pasted down with oil, as if painted. As soon as the bell rang he started to talk slowly in a gruff voice like a gate swinging on rusty hinges in the wind.

The woman next to him had grey hair permanently waved, and never spoke, except to say, " Have a nut." The man was very helpful to Joe because he was an expert and explained the whole fight, hold by hold.

At first the wrestlers circled watchfully round one another, looking for an opening. The man with the painted head said, " You watch Em, he'll be on to him, just give him that opening, watch, it's coming, no, hold it, now, no, he missed it, he's waiting to put the scissors on him."

The Python prepared to spring on Shmule, who stood quite still, waiting. Then, as the Python bent his legs to jump, Shmule stepped aside and Python fell on his face with a heavy slap.

" He missed him," said the man with painted hair, and even as he spoke Shmule leapt onto the Python, catching both legs below knee level in the crook of his arm and pulling sharply.

" Ouch ! " shouted Python. " Ouff ! " said the man with painted hair. " He got the old calf-lock on him."

The Python shook himself like an alligator, and one of his knees slipped free and bowled Shmule over. The Python caught hold of Shmule by the foot and thigh and prepared to throw him, but Shmule pressed into the canvas with both hands and heaved his body into the Python's ribs like a battering ram. The Python reeled into the ropes, and the bell rang.

Shmule turned to his corner, but the Python came after him. The crowd roared with one voice, " Look behind you ! "

Shmule turned sharply, and the referee jumped in front of Python and faced him to his corner. The Python was furious, and pushing his seconds off the ring, he picked up his chair and punched his fist through the seat.

" Phoo ! " said the man with painted hair, " what a round, the bastard turning on him like that after the bell ! "

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"Have some nuts, Fred," the permanently-waved woman said.

"The swine!" said Sonia with tears in her eyes. "Did you see that?"

The seconds rubbed them down and waved towels while the wrestlers spat into pails, and breathed deep and even, glaring at one another across the ring, listening to their managers' advice. The crowd wasn't shouting "Carve up," any more. They could see it was serious. The bell rang for the second round.

The Python at once shot from his corner, his fingers crooked to seize Shmule, his face rigid, calling the muscles of his body to attention. Shmule crouched like a panther, waiting.

"He's giving him half a stone," the man with the painted head said. "He's got to play a waiting game, let the Python use hisself up, then come in quick. Ahh!"

The Python had his arms about Shmule and was hugging him like a bear. Shmule's arms were pinned to his sides, and he couldn't move. He twisted to one side then to the other, but the Python shortened the hug, working the grip of one hand upon the other wrist slowly up his arm. Shmule's face twisted with pain.

"Let him get out of that one," the man said. Sonia clenched and unclenched her hands, and Joe's mother looked away. Mr. Kandinsky was breathing hard, but Joe just stared, wondering what Shmule would do now. The crowd was shouting, "Finish him, Python!"

Then Shmule moved his hand up and down in fast little movements against his thigh, and the referee, jumping about, watching, saw the sign, and told Python to let go, the Hammer gave in.

But Python wouldn't let go, and Shmule bit his lips in agony. Now the crowd shouted against the Python, but that didn't help Shmule. The referee and all the seconds jumped on him to tear him away, and the bell rang.

Blackie and Oliver helped Shmule to his corner and gently rubbed him, putting wet towels on his face. The crowd was furious with the Python, but he didn't care. He shouted back at them, showing off his muscles and asking if anyone would like to try them.

"Filth!" Mr. Kandinsky shouted, but poor Shmule looked pale and his eyes were closed.

"He's a dirty fighter," the man with painted hair said, "but give credit, he's got a grip like iron, the bleeder."

"Get us some more nuts, Fred," the woman replied.

Blackie and Oliver were working hard on Shmule, who breathed deeply, the colour coming back into his face. By the time the bell rang for the third round, he seemed as good as new.

"But you can't tell," the man with the painted head said. "He could have a couple ribs broke clean and he wouldn't know till after."

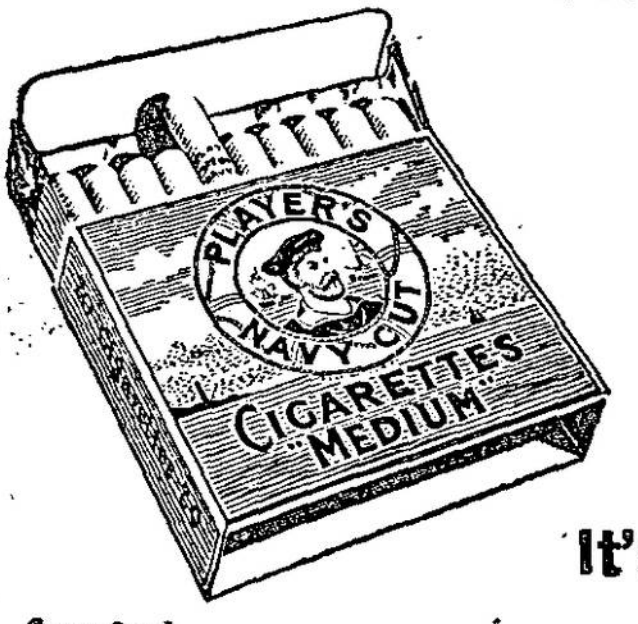
"Has he got a couple ribs broke?" Joe asked.

"God forbid," Mr. Kandinsky answered, "God forbid."

Blackie and Oliver must have told Shmule not to waste time,

Whatever the pleasure

Player's complete it



Player's Please

It's the tobacco that counts

(NCC 827)

because he came out fast and made straight for the Python, who, being pleased with himself, was a bit careless.

Shmule clasped his hands together and raised them for a rabbit-punch, but he was too late. The Python crouched away, out of distance, not careless any more. Then a look of pain suddenly crossed Shmule's face, and the Python grinned and came in to attack, his hands low.

"He's hurt," Sonia whispered.

"He's hurt all right," the man in front of Joe said. But what a surprise! Shmule suddenly leapt forward and caught the Python a great crack on the jaw with his left fist. The Python looked surprised and fell down.

"No boxing," the crowd yelled.

The Python started to get up at once, but Shmule was on top of him, his knees on his stomach, his hands firmly planted on his shoulders, pressing them to the canvas. As he pressed he strengthened the grip of his knees. The Python groaned, shouted. He jerked and jumped and twisted, but he couldn't throw Shmule off.

"He can give it," the man said, "but he can't take it. Go on, boy, do him." The Python beat the floor with both hands and Shmule let go at once. "Good boy," the man said.

"He should give him the same as he got," Sonia said. "Why should he fight him clean?"

The crowd cheered Shmule, but the Python wasn't hurt as much as they thought, because as soon as Shmule broke away, he leapt to his feet. Not fast enough, though.

Shmule wasn't so green now. He didn't stop watching the Python for a second, and he saw him tensed to leap. Ready for him he caught the Python another crack on the chin as he came up. The Python went down with Shmule on top of him, but he was saved by the bell.

"That's more like it," the man said. "He's got the old Python on the squirm, proper."

"Get us some nuts, Fred," the woman said.

"Fancy an ice?" the man asked.

"Some nuts, Fred," the woman said again.

"How's the boy doing now, Sonia?" Mr. Kandinsky asked.

"He's all right," Sonia said, "another round like that and he'll win."

"Shmule is winning," Joe told his mother.

"That's good," she replied. "But it's awful to watch their faces."

In the fourth round the Python set out to finish Shmule off. He tried all the fancy holds, the Indian Death-Lock, the Flying Mare, the Cobra, but Shmule was like an eel, he didn't stay still long enough for the grips to take.

"He's using his speed now," the man said. "Let's see the Python catch up with that."

But the Python couldn't catch up with that. After a couple of minutes the crowd started to laugh, because he lumbered around like a

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great ox, while Shmule danced circles round him, cracking him on the back and chest every so often. Now the Python was on his guard against face blows, and being careful made him even more clumsy.

He was furious with the crowd for laughing, and he looked at Shmule through slit eyes, waiting to murder him. " Let me get my hands on you, laughing boy, that's all," he said.

Then suddenly Shmule nipped in close, his foot jabbed out, and the Python fell heavily onto the canvas, his arms round Shmule's leg. But as he fell Shmule struck the Python a heavy blow to the stomach, and pulled his leg free. The Python held his stomach with both hands and his head came forward, his neck bent towards Shmule like a beast to the slaughterer.

Shmule folded his hands together as if to pray, lifted them and, carefully aiming, brought a rabbit-punch clean onto the Python's neck. The Python slumped forward over his hands, and Shmule stood back watching. The Python didn't move.

" Cold meat," someone shouted. " Hammer ! " all the tailors yelled. " Hammer ! " shouted Joe.

The Python was out cold.

It was the latest night ever. It was late when Joe and his mother and Mr. Kandinsky left Sonia at the swimming-baths waiting for Shmule, both of them to follow on later. It was late when they got home, but no one suggested that Joe should go to bed because it was, after all, an occasion.

Only, when Joe said it was only fair for him to bring Africana in since he had been such a help, Mr. Kandinsky said, " Leave him sleep. Tomorrow is also a day."

Joe's mother lit the gas-fire in the kitchen, and put the kettle on the stove to make a cup of tea, while Mr. Kandinsky told them about the patent steam presser which, only four years old, he could buy for nothing from the Grosvenor Garment Company in Fournier Street. With a bit of patching up, tighten a few screws, a good repadding job, scrape off the rust, a coat of paint, it would make a first-class presser, good as new.

Now Mr. Kandinsky didn't have Shmule to worry about any more, he could concentrate on the steam presser again. In fact, now that Shmule had actually won the fight, it seemed unreasonable to Mr. Kandinsky that he shouldn't have the presser.

" A chance like this, Becky," he said, " doesn't, after all, come up every day. A chance of a lifetime. He would take thirty pound for it, he said, but I know better. He would be glad to get twenty pound just as well. After all, all the big firms can buy new pressers, what do they want with an old machine four years old, rusty, dirty ? And who's got thirty pounds who isn't a big firm ? Believe me, he would be glad to take twenty. And yet who's got even twenty ? "

" Shmule has got twenty-five pounds, because he told me the winner gets twenty-five pounds to himself," Joe said.

Mr. Kandinsky looked thunderstruck. He slapped his forehead

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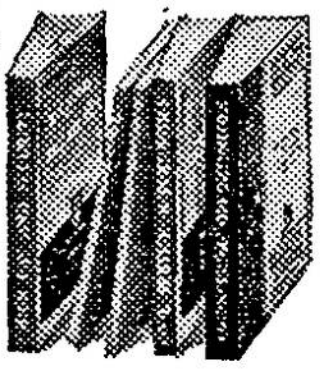

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with his palm. "You're right, Joe," he said. "Shmule has got twenty-five pounds."

Joe's mother looked over from the stove where she was pouring boiling water into the teapot.

"Shmule must buy Sonia a ring before anything else," she said. "It's a shame otherwise."

"That's true," Mr. Kandinsky said, pursing his lips. "Quite right. Mind you, if Shmule was to come along and tell me, I bought the steam presser, what about a partnership?—I would tell him straight away, certainly. But naturally, Sonia must have a ring. Only, this other way she wouldn't just be a girl with a ring marrying a young feller, a worker in the tailoring. This way she is marrying a guvnor, a partner in a business, and what is more, a growing business. Because I tell you, Becky, with a patent steam presser we can take in so much jobbing, we can make a living from this alone.

"Still, Sonia must have a ring. Maybe it is the only chance Shmule gets his whole life, but that doesn't matter. A ring is important." Mr. Kandinsky was very upset.

It was selfish of Sonia to stop Shmule becoming a guvnor. Mr. Kandinsky pressed the lemon in his cup with a spoon. Joe sipped his milk, wondering what Africana would do about this. Then they heard voices on the stairs.

Shmule and Sonia came in arm-in-arm, and though Shmule looked tired his eyes were bright.

"I couldn't get him away from there," Sonia said. "They all wanted to see him." Mr. Kandinsky gripped Shmule's hand.

"Good luck to you always," he said, "good health, and every blessing."

Joe's mother said "It was awful to see, but you were marvellous, Shmule, marvellous. Only, don't let him do any more, Sonia. You mustn't do it any more, Shmule. Buy Sonia a ring now, and finish with the wrestling."

"She's right," Mr. Kandinsky said. "It's for the beast of the field."

"You know what he told me round one?" Shmule said. "He told me to lie down in the seventh, I could share the purse with him. That's what he told me."

"That Python," Sonia said, angry, "he wanted Shmule to lie down!"

"When I tell him I was fighting clean he says he'll ruin me."

"You hear," Mr. Kandinsky said to all of them. "You hear what kind of a business this wrestling is?"

"It kills you for real development of the body beautiful," Sonia said.

"No good for the muscular tone or the efficiency," Shmule said. "Still, I can give baby a ring."

Sonia hugged him.

"I want to talk to you with a serious proposition," Mr. Kandinsky said, clearing his throat and holding his hand up for silence. "Namely, now that you got a bit of capital, and I am—after all, the truth is the truth—an old man. A partnership."

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Shmule looked more dazed than the dreaded Python the last time he was hit. Sonia hugged him again.

"Baby," she said, "you hear?"

"But," continued Mr. Kandinsky, and he explained that Shmule would have to bring with him a patent steam presser.

"Thank you very much," said Shmule, "for a hundred eighty-seven pounds a patent presser. Not two?"

"Don't grab," Mr. Kandinsky said. "Listen a minute." He told him about the second-hand presser over at Grosvenor Garments.

"You think he would take twenty?" Shmule asked, stroking his lips.

"Take?" answered Mr. Kandinsky. "He would drag it out of your hands."

Sonia didn't say anything. Her face couldn't make up its mind whether she was pleased or not It was a difficult decision.

"Let me speak to Sonia a minute," Mr. Kandinsky said. "Sonia," he said, "here you are, a young woman in the bloom of her beauty, a perfect mate for life with this Maccabeus here." Sonia blushed and looked at Shmule.

"Two years you have been patient," Mr. Kandinsky continued. "Listen, Sonia, this is important. Two years you have lived on the word of this man alone. No ring to bind the promise, so that sometimes other people, busybodies with big mouths, who didn't know what kind of a girl you are, they said, look at Sonia, no ring. What kind of an engagement?" Mr. Kandinsky paused.

Sonia's eyes were full of tears as she listened to him tell her not more than the truth.

Mr. Kandinsky continued. "Sonia," he said, "they didn't know this boy, what a fighter he is, how clean and honest, and what a worker, no one to touch him in the entire East End. Him they saw tonight. Now they know what he is. And you saw him, too, what he will do for you, to get you a better ring than any girl in Novak Blouses ever had."

"Gay-Day Blouses," Sonia said tenderly.

"Gay-Day," Mr. Kandinsky repeated. "But something else no girl in Gay-Day ever had. You know what it is?" He pointed to Sonia to answer the question. She shook her head.

"They didn't marry a fellow who was already, a young man, in his own business. That's what they didn't have."

Mr. Kandinsky made his last point in a loud voice, his pointing finger sweeping round the whole world to find another girl who could say she had done better than Sonia.

"Now, Sonia," he continued after a moment in which Sonia squeezed Shmule's hand. "I ask you straight out. Which is better, such a husband, a champion, a guvnor, with the world in front of him—or a fiancé, works for Kandinsky, the Fashion Street trousers-maker, wrestles Saturday nights to make a few pound so he might be able to get married one day to a girl at Gay-Day Blouses with a big diamond ring? Don't answer me," he went on as Sonia opened her mouth. "Think first. It is in your hands, his life, your life. Drink a cup of tea and think."

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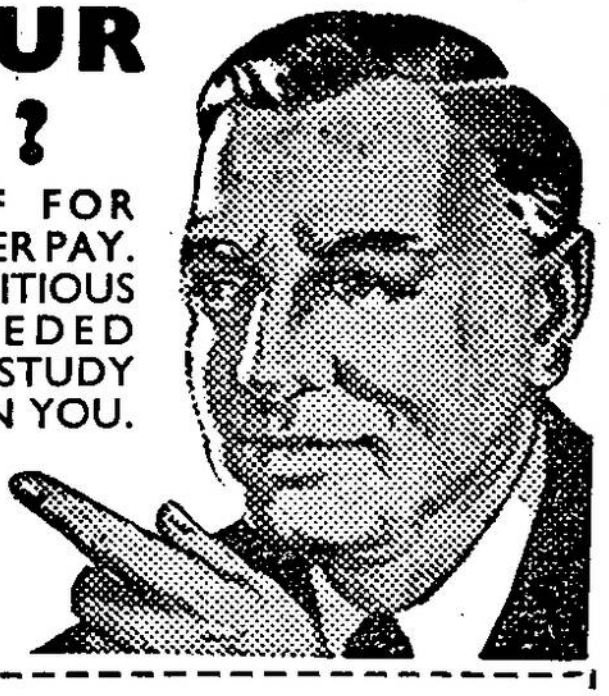

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That was how Mr. Kandinsky made Shmule his partner, and though everyone was pleased, they said Joe should be in bed.

The next morning was fine and sunny. When Joe woke up he heard the horses clopping over the cobbles and goods trains rattling from the arches. The first thing he thought was he must tell Africana. He dressed quietly, leaving his mother to have her Sunday-morning lie-in, and ran downstairs.

Mr. Kandinsky was already at work, and Joe shouted good morning and rushed into the yard.

"Good old thing," he shouted out, but there was no rustle from Africana's house. The house looked like a pile of old boxes waiting to be chopped up for firewood, desolate. Africana was gone.

"He's gone," Joe shouted, running back to the workroom. "He's gone, Mr. Kandinsky, he's gone!"

"What?" said Mr. Kandinsky. "Who's gone?"

"Africana's gone, he's just gone," Joe said, and how would he bring his father back from Africa?

"Let's have a look," Mr. Kandinsky said. "Let's keep our head and look."

They searched the yard carefully.

"Let's look in the house again," Mr. Kandinsky said.

"It's empty," Joe replied, tears coming fast. "Can't you see it's empty?"

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"Let's look, all the same," said Mr. Kandinsky.

He searched through the bed of remnants. "What's this?" he said. He bent down and picked up something. It was a gleaming golden sovereign. He handed it to Joe. "What is it?" asked Joe.

"Come inside, Joe," Mr. Kandinsky said. "I will tell you."

"He's gone," Joe said.

"Come inside," said Mr. Kandinsky, and he put his arm round Joe's shoulder.

"You know what this is, Joe?" he asked, giving him the sovereign. "This is a golden sovereign. And this is what has happened. You could see yourself that unicorn didn't do so well in Fashion Street, ailing the whole time, no interest, miserable the whole day. You know what he's done? He's gone back to Africa like you said he should. But just to show it's nothing personal, he left this sovereign on account of that magic horn worth five thousand pound."

"Ten thousand," said Joe.

"Ten thousand pound, I mean," continued Mr. Kandinsky. "Meanwhile, keep this for luck."

"He won't come back," Joe said.

"Maybe not. Unicorns can't grow in Fashion Street."

Joe went upstairs slowly, rubbing the golden sovereign between his fingers. There was a small rough piece broken on top of it but otherwise it was like the coin on Mr. Kandinsky's father's watch-chain, which made two golden sovereigns in the house.

When his mother came into the kitchen, her face blanched with sleep, Joe asked whether two sovereigns would bring his father back. It was the only thing the unicorn had forgotten to arrange.

With the sleep still on her, she didn't know at first what he meant. Joe explained carefully, and she said yes, it was a great help. They would find the rest of the passage money somehow.

They would never go to Africa, it was a dream. Next week she must see about Joe starting school, he was growing up learning nothing about life.

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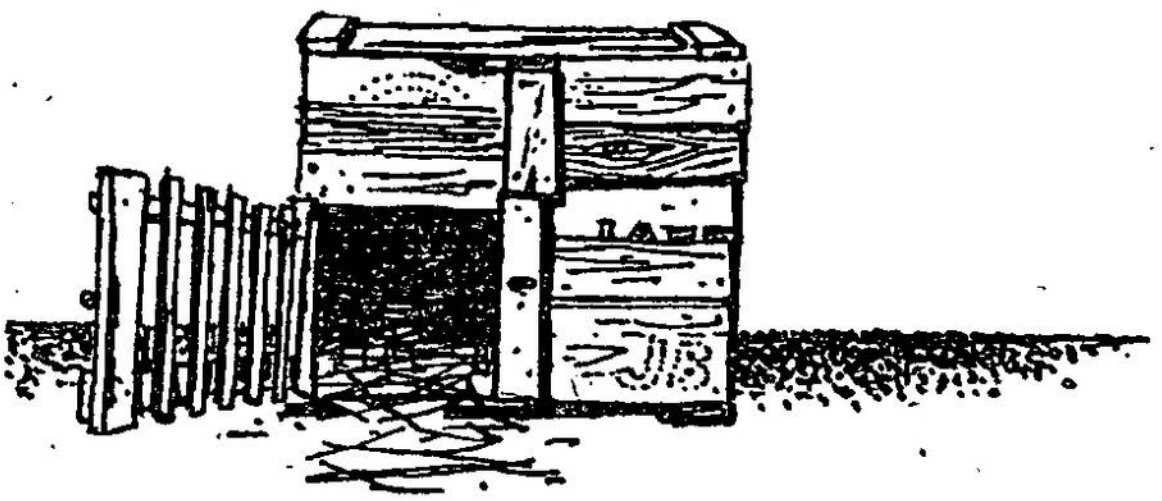

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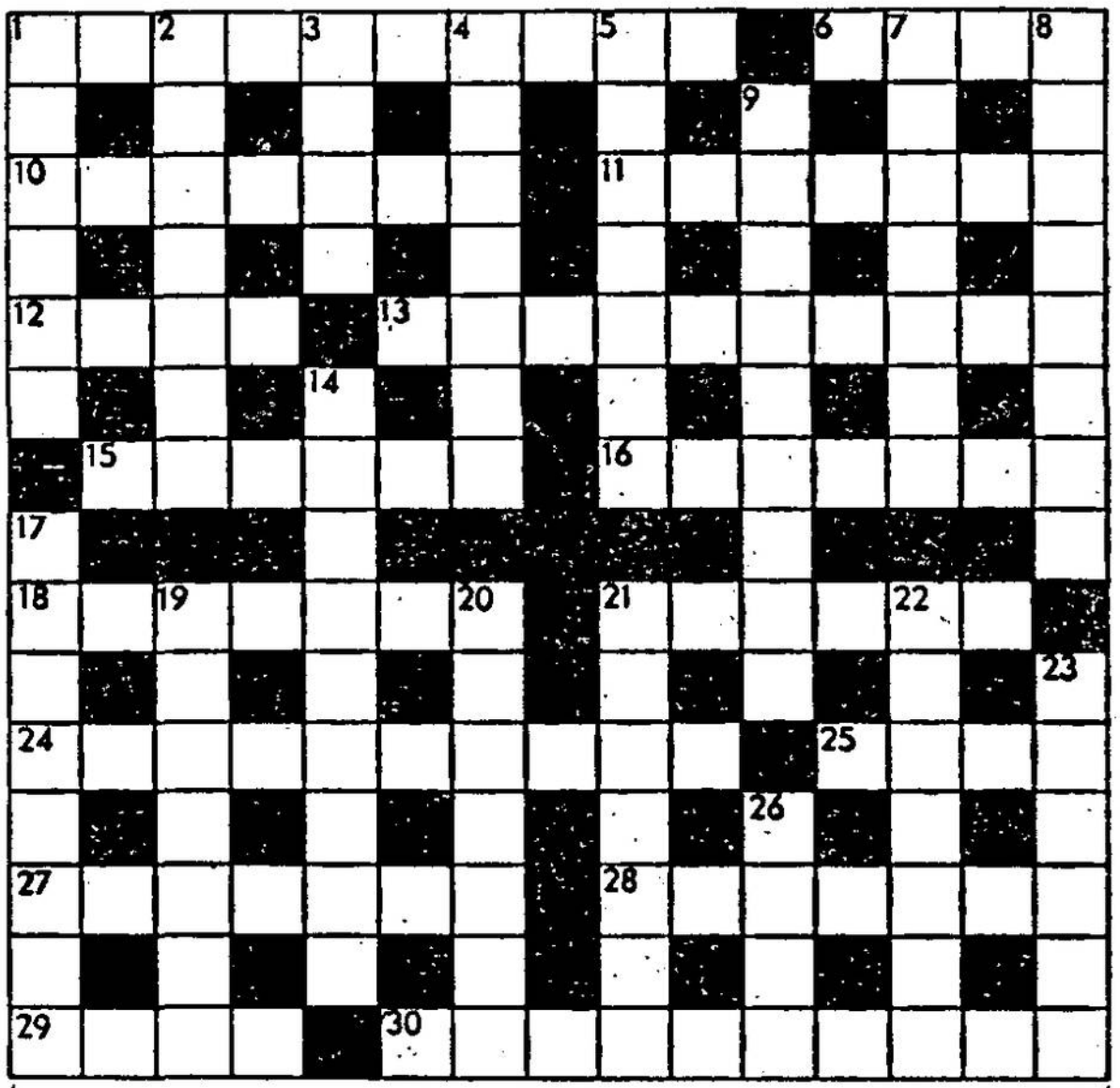

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CLUES

Across

1 This plant suggests that the bird has quite a capacity for drink (6–4).

6 When Taffy loses his head he becomes horribly greedy (4).

10 You and you and Sally go together as a matter of course (7).

11 Look, the sixth ball! (7).

12 The censorious old Roman is a bit of a turncoat (4).

13 Cheerful little dinghies, apparently (5–5).

15 Little Edmund perished—going round in circles? (6).

16 Leave Junior where he is for a broad-brimmed hat (7).

18 An irate little saint becomes muddled and goes on the stage (7).

21 He led for Bardell against Pickwick (6).

24 Bids involve effort—the result is a very blasé body (5, 5).

25 I'm a Latin goddess? What a notion! (4).

27 But the Spanish princess isn't necessarily a little girl (7).

28 A generous political party? (7).

29 O say, what kind of bean is this? (4).

30 Does a raw hand suffer from this too? (10).

Down

1 Grab the eggs—or is it a piece of machinery? (6).

2 Old port or new bread may be (7).

3 Slow confused birds (4).

4 Bend the trees—the timber isn't thick (7).

5 They're silly, but nice to eat (7).

7 Fifty matches for these ladies, but they were celibate (7).

8 First aid for the salad (8).

9 "And with the —— —— hand in hand Came innocence and she." (F. Thompson) (3, 6).

14 I'd dissent from a slight disarrangement (9).

17 It sounds as if father was doing the cooking (8).

19 Economical, like an English flower (7).

20 Let them do this, Marie Antoinette is said to have said (3, 4).

21 Bewildered—by part of a loudspeaker? (7).

22 Endure a mixed guerdon (7).

23 A little village in Denmark perhaps (6).

26 The archbishop's autograph appears on reversing his vestment (4).

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PRACTICAL RESULTS

Student 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it . . . *Student 778/2119:* I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student 184/315:* As you suggested, I submitted the articles to the **NEW STATESMAN.** One was published on the 17th July. I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . . *Student 181/282:* You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY:** they have offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . . *Student 591/287:* You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it . . . *Student 120/288:* I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student 1179/347:* I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . *Student 1954/157:* I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD;** they have since accepted another and I have sent in a third . . . *Student 171/162:* I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student 1106/156:* The **B.B.C.** accepted the script for the Light Programme—fee 9 guineas—after my first lesson . . . *Student 141/76:* The article which I wrote for the Second Test paper appeared in the **SUNDAY MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation.

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